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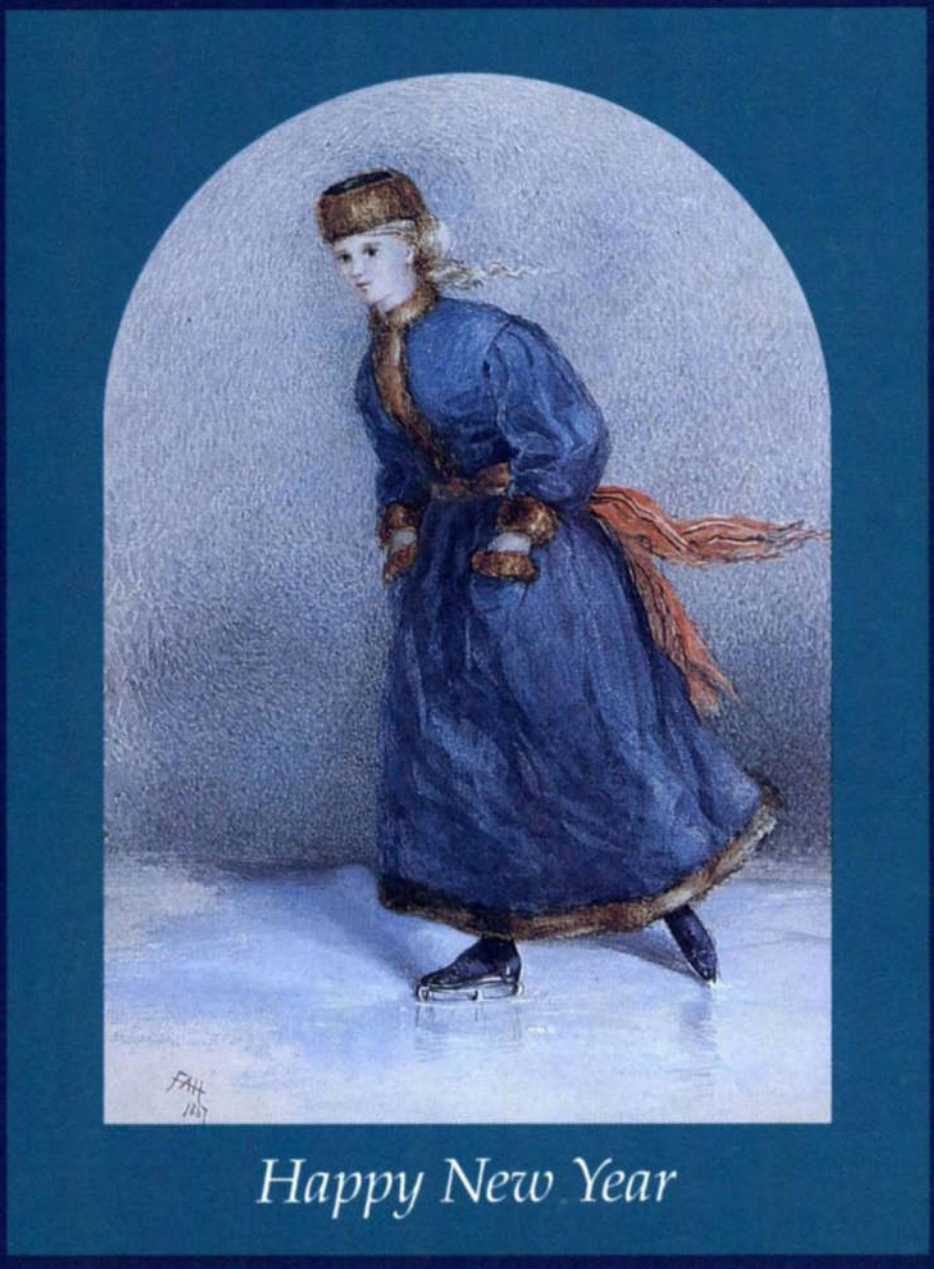
The Beaver

EXPLORING · CANADA'S · HISTORY

A Young Woman of the North-West

Montreal's Ordeal, 1885 • The Halifax Telegraph, 1799



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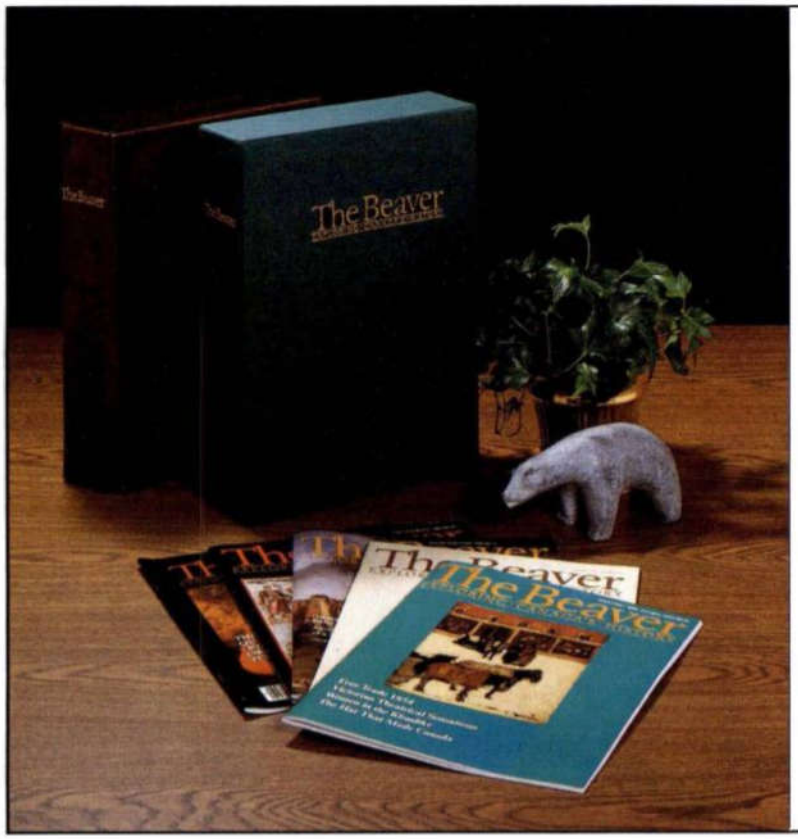

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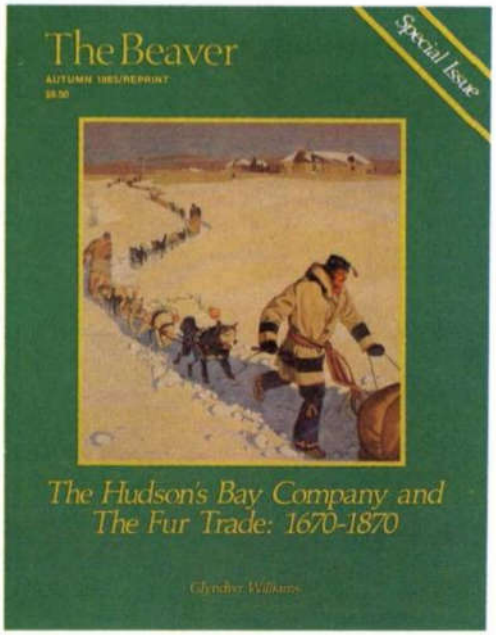

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By GLYNDWR WILLIAMS

86 pages. Illustrated

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The Beaver

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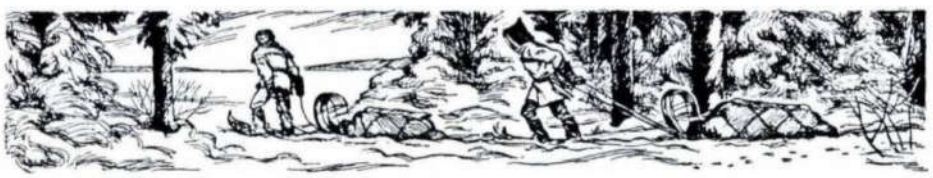


The Fragrance of the Past

Does the sense of smell have any significant role to play in our understanding of history? It may very well be that it does, but only, I suspect, when remembered fragrances unaccountably evoke times past.

"We have to find a way to make the past smell again", writes historian Michael Bliss in an article in this issue of *The Beaver* on Montreal's terrible smallpox epidemic of 1885. Professor Bliss conjours up a haunting and detailed picture of a vanished time. The imagination is firmly engaged and the distant past draws near enough to be examined and wondered at. The olfactory sense, however, does not come fully into play — and we might all say a profound "thank goodness!" for that. The worst vapours of time past long since blew away on the wind and to get them back we must recreate the intolerable conditions that produced them. That is within our power, but who in a society that has done so much to eliminate unpleasant odours would want them back again?

It is often said that if we could enter a time machine and visit the past the first things we would notice would be the noise and the smell. If we could arrange to land in some quiet country place we might smell a field of ripening barley and hear, overhead, the whirr of a passing flock of passenger pigeons. In Montreal circa 1885 we would hear the unfamiliar rumble of cart wheels — many of them iron-clad — rolling over stone streets. Before we became used to this din we would notice the smell. In winter it would be the heavy smell of coal smoke, once familiar in all Canadian cities in winter. In summer a thousand contending smells would jostle for attention, many decidedly unpleasant, others curiously agreeable. The pocket handkerchief tucked into every Victorian sleeve had many uses, one of which was as a defence against odd smells.

In the past there were vapours you could only run away from. The summer miasma of Montreal circa 1885 was still a problem in the 1890s when my grandparents lived just off Sherbrooke Street. With the coming of summer, my grandfather, like many other Montrealers of his time, moved his family out into the country to enjoy the pleasant air of rural Quebec. My grandmother and the children remained at Hillhead surrounded by flowers and sweet-smelling fields until cool autumn winds made Shuter Street habitable again. By Christmas, Canada's famous Fresh Air was attracting crowds to outdoor winter amusements and there was a strong fragrance of cedar in all the markets.

If we ventured into the past — to attend a gala ball at Rideau Hall in 1876 or to listen to John A. Macdonald address a large and warm crowd at Kingston in 1867 — the chances are that we would wince and possibly even blanch at a dozen unaccustomed smells that were hardly noticed by those who lived in an age that knew nothing of dry-cleaning or daily showers. They might wince at our polluted air.

There were not only unpleasant odours in the past, of course. There were good smells too. We have experienced many of them ourselves and they have often helped to make the past live again for us. Who does not remember the aroma of freshly baked bread or pie; the smoky scent of guttering candles; the sharp clean smell of an open wood fire; the fragrance of a freshly mown field of hay in summer; the perfume of the air in August just before or just after rain; the sweet scent of the winter woods when maple sugar is being made or the autumn scents of apples and pears ripening on the trees?

There are certain smells and fragrances that seem to have the power to carry us back into times past — even to times that were not personally known to us. It is as if some scents revive a memory hidden deep in the blood. Flowers have that special quality and so do burning leaves in the autumn and freshly thawed earth in the spring. Are these memories of our own times past, memories handed down to us or faint glimpses of some half-remembered past life?

Much is made these days of "living history" and many historic sites are peopled with "interpreters" in "period" costumes who are supposed to make us feel that we have stepped through a time-warp into that magic land called "olden days". Almost invariably, however, these "history guides" prove to be more of a hindrance than a help. They are far too self-conscious, too "fresh off the shelf" to be entirely convincing.

More potent are the smells that creep in to carry us back. At Christmas at Mackenzie House in Toronto the smell of cider simmering on the kitchen range convinces you for a moment that you might, indeed, meet the aged "Firebrand" at a turn of the stairs. At Lower Fort Garry on a summer afternoon the sweet smell of drying grass, just cut by the scythe, calls back a summer a century past and as you climb the bank of the dry creek you might not be surprised to see the scythe

Harvest time, 1885, from "Picturesque Canada".

man himself, still cutting the long grass of summer, 1891.

The power of the olfactory sense to summon up the past has its most famous celebration in Marcel Proust's *A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu* in which the smell of a crumb of madeleine cake dipped in tea summons up the memories of a lifetime. Proust's remarkable recollection of things past is merely an extreme example of a phenomenon that has touched us all at one time or another. We recognize a long-forgotten smell and suddenly the past comes flooding in.

Many of us can remember a time when horses were much more in evidence than they are today. As recently as the years of World War II deliveries were made by horse and cart by department stores, dairies, bakeries and other commercial concerns that relied on home delivery. I am not all that old, but one of my earliest memories is the faint rumble of the Royal Mail cart as it came up our street in Winnipeg just at bedtime to collect the mail from the box on the corner.

Canadian boys of my generation played hockey on the street, using a piece of frozen manure as a puck. Although cautioned not to, we rode on ice wagons and stole rides on the rear of the Bay's delivery cart. At birthday parties in winter we sped through the streets of suburban Winnipeg in horse-drawn talley-hos.

Then, quite suddenly, the horses vanished, replaced by trucks and vans of the post-war era. We forgot the horses of our childhood and the friendly clip-clop of their shod hooves on the city streets, but sometimes, in the moment before sleep comes, I think I hear them.

This autumn, at the North American Fur Trade Conference on Mackinac Island, memories of the horse came rushing back. Automobiles have been banned on Mackinac Island since 1896. All the major transportation is supplied by horses. I had quite forgotten the strong, musky odour of working horses that lingers in the air, even after the team has passed on down the street and out of sight. It was a charming and evocative scent. It made the past smell again.

History, after all, is not one of the exact sciences. Not everything can be known about the past: the documentation is often incomplete; the sources suspect; the interpretation open to question. There are moments, however, rare as they may be, when some fragrance passing on the breeze presents you with a vision of time past that seems curiously complete and real. Then we can say with Rossetti: "I have been here before,/ But when or how I cannot tell;/ I know the grass beyond the door,/The sweet keen smell,/ The sighing sound, the lights around the shore." ♦

—Christopher Dafoe

THE ODOUR OF CONTAGION, MONTREAL 1885

'Something Terrible'

By Michael Bliss

May 1885. A reporter for the Montreal *Herald* is told to investigate the city's sanitary condition. He fortifies himself for the assignment with a bottle — a bottle of *eau de cologne!* He also takes with him a lump of camphor.

He needs these olfactory armaments because his is a journey into a hell of foul, poisonous smells. "The lanes and alleys are . . . filled with garbage and refuse of every kind, which . . . throw off their foul, typhoid-breeding exhalations into the atmosphere to poison those who are so unfortunate as to be compelled to breathe it." The lane running behind Nos. 386 to 418 St. Antoine Street is half-choked with ashes and decaying vegetable matter, he finds. "The stench arising from this mess of filth is something horrible." In other places the "pestilential rubbish" is packed in barrels stinking so badly that it is "absolutely nauseating" to approach them.

Other Montrealers don't seem to mind. The "poorest classes" live and play among smells the journalist cannot tolerate. The stench from the tenement-lined court behind 560-562 Mignonne Street, which the residents hardly notice, drives him away. Behind 138 St. Germain Street "a lot of sickly looking children were seen playing about the yard, apparently oblivious of their disagreeable and deadly surroundings. The smell from this offensive spot was something terrible, and it is a wonder that human beings are able to live breathing such an atmosphere."

The alley behind the well-to-do houses on St. Hubert Street is two-feet deep in "decaying vegetables, fish, eggs, bones and other organic matter, broken bottles, pots and pans, old iron, straw, manure, ashes, sweepings and fragments".

"The lane gave forth a score of separate and distinct smells", the reporter notes. "Amid the vile scene children were playing, their young lives being slowly but surely sapped by the noxious vapours they were forced to inhale."

Early August. The spring thaw is traditionally Montreal's most fragrant season, but summer is not much better. The *Herald* again sends its men into the bowels of the city to find out how the poor are coping with heat, dirt, and foul air. The stench of some of the lanes is still almost unbearable, they report, but now it is the insides of the tenements that draw attention: "The smell of humanity that isn't washed, and of clothes that are; the odour of boiled potatoes, greasy landings and airless bedrooms. . . . In certain districts the air is thick, saturated and given to smells. What a mercy it is that the sense of smell in time is blunted to the faint, febrile fetor!"

The reporter's sense of smell revives when he gets home, "where the air is sweet . . . How like luxuries seem the bath, the change of raiment that has the soiled odour of court and alley about it, the dash of lavender water as exorcism for memories of unholy smells." The sordid memories soon recede from his consciousness, leaving him with reflections on how the virtues of the worthy poor "abide with one kinder and more comfortable than a softly shaded room and above the scent of flowers."

* * * * * *

Historians are not very adept at sniffing out the odours of the past. We live in such extensively and deliberately deodorized environments, which so seldom trigger our own senses of smell, that thoughts of smells past rarely occur to us. It seems paradoxical in any case to "think" about smells. The sensual impact of odour is not easy to recreate between the lines of a history book, or anywhere else. Novelists and poets are perhaps more apt than historians to try to recreate the full range of sensory experience. Margaret Atwood, for example, is unusually conscious of odour in her little-known Canadian history book, *The Days of the Rebels* (Canada's Illustrated Heritage Series, 1977), writing, for example, of the "overpowering" smelliness of the upper classes at their elegant balls, the use of perfume notwithstanding. Most of us know that when we visit reconstructions of Louisbourg and other historic sites, we are inhaling an almost literally deodorized approach to the past. The ruins remained to be rebuilt. The stinks vanished long ago.

In fact the odours were everywhere in the past, and certain classes of people were at times intensely con-

Nightmarish scenes were enacted in the fire-lit streets in times of pestilence, as in this depiction of an 1823 cholera epidemic in Quebec painted by Victorian artist Joseph Légaré. Smudge pots were lit in a vain attempt to purify the putrid air. National Gallery of Canada

scious of them. In his wonderful pioneering social history of smell, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odour and the French Social Imagination*, (originally published as *Le miasme et la jonquille*), French historian Alain Corbin has brilliantly traced the revolution in olfactory sensitivity that accompanied modernization in the nineteenth century. The rising bourgeoisie had an increasingly keen appreciation of smells, both good and bad, which sharply differentiated them from the masses, who seemed largely indifferent to the odours around them, including their own. It was not a question of urban, industrial France becoming smellier, Corbin implies. Rather, in a revolution of rising snouts, many Frenchmen could no longer tolerate traditional fetors.

North America experienced a smiliar heightening of smell consciousness. Montreal in the 1880s, a city of about 167,000 people, approximately 55 percent French-speaking, was typical in its citizens' awareness of odour. In 1885, concern about smells in Montreal became particularly concentrated because of a terrible epidemic stalking the city's lanes, streets, and tenements. To understand Montreal's history in that year we have to find a way to let the past smell again.

* * * * * *

Stench was identified with disease. By the early nineteenth century it was sanitarian orthodoxy to believe that most infectious disease was caused by miasma, or poisonous gasses, emanating from decaying animal and vegetable matter. Inhale the noxious vapours and you were in trouble (just as if you inhaled, say, chlorine gas today). Your sense of smell was a warning system, alerting you to the presence of evil, toxic miasms. "All smell is disease" the great British public health reformer Edwin Chadwick wrote. Sensible nineteenth-century men and women avoided foul odours like the plague. Many of them believed that bad smells literally were the plague.

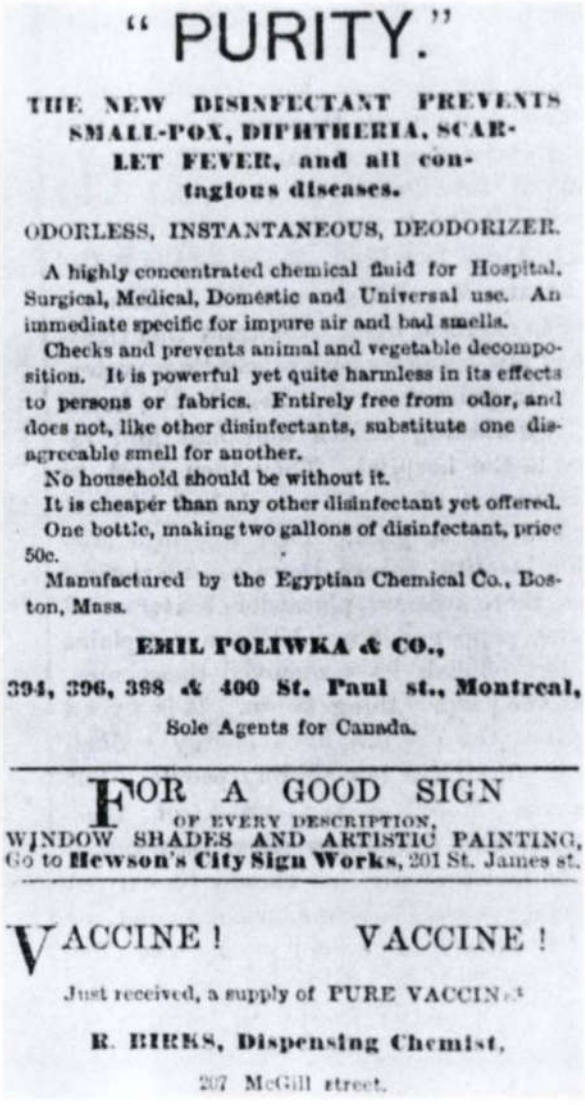
One of the delights of the Canadian winter was the fact that the cold killed odours. The idea of winter as a particularly healthy season, characterized by clean, crisp, fresh air, helped reinforce Canadians', especially Montrealers', enthusiasm for winter sports in the late nineteenth century. Canadian winters and good health could be associated, and perhaps made into major tourist attractions, because this was the season for romping around outdoors in perfect safety, with only Jack Frost nipping at your nose. The dead of winter seemed the ideal time for play and conviviality. Thus Montreal led the way in North America in winter festivals with its series of Winter Carnivals in the 1880s.

Spring was not so much a season of rebirth as a time of decay and peril. Natural and human refuse that had lain frozen and odourless all winter now began to ferment and putrefy, generating foul-smelling gasses that seemed to cause a multitude of diseases — typhoid, diphtheria, scarlet fever, cholera. By the 1880s many Montrealers strongly supported movements to clean up the city to remove the source of the poisons. As the *Herald* editorialized in February, 1885:

> Pure air is one of the first essentials of health. . . . There is nothing that pollutes the air so quickly and with such injurious effects as human *excreta*. Nature has wisely and mercifully made all such matter offensive to the senses. She invariably gives due warning to all, and they are most unwise and their own worst enemies, who do not profit by that warning. Wherever there is an offensive odour there is danger, and it is the duty of everyone to have the cause of it removed as quickly and effectively as possible. . . . Our readers need not be told that this work is not well done in Montreal. The vile smells which pervade some localities in the summer months, the prevalence of typhoid fever, diphtheria, scarlatina and other malarial diseases, prove that the means of keeping this city clean are dreadfully inefficient. If our fellow-citizens could realize how many are killed in Montreal every year by poisoned air generated in accumulations of filth of one kind and another, they would be appalled. . . . It is only when some dreadful disease, such as the cholera, visits a city that men generally attribute it to its true cause, and attempt, when perhaps it is too late, to apply the proper remedy.

It happened that cholera, which had ravaged Montreal and other Canadian cities on several occasions between 1832 and 1866 was again raging in southern Europe in the spring of 1885. Fear of cholera intensified citizen concern about the spring clean-up that year. Montrealers made public health a key issue in the municipal elections, and through the newspapers raised a tremendous outcry when the city's scavengers (garbage collectors) failed to get the job done as the days got warmer and the odours intensified. The *Herald*'s mid-May exposé of city stench was part of the campaign to put pressure on the Health Department. So was a furious editorial in the *Gazette:*

> It is the 16th of May, and a hundred streets in the city stink like a sty! Within twenty days the thermometer will range between 80 and 90 degrees, and the effluvia sweat out from the filthy dirt heap and befouled gutter will be thick and dense in every street and square. It will roll its invisible waves of poison and death everywhere. It will rush in at our doors as we open them, drift in through our windows as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A highly concentrated chemical fluid for Hospital, Surgical, Medical, Domestic and Universal use. An immediate specific for impure air and bad smells.
Checks and prevents animal and vegetable decomposition. It is powerful yet quite harmless in its effects to persons or fabrics. Entirely free from odor, and does not, like other disinfectants, substitute one disagreeable smell for another.
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VACCINE ! VACCINE !
Just received, a supply of PURE VACCINE
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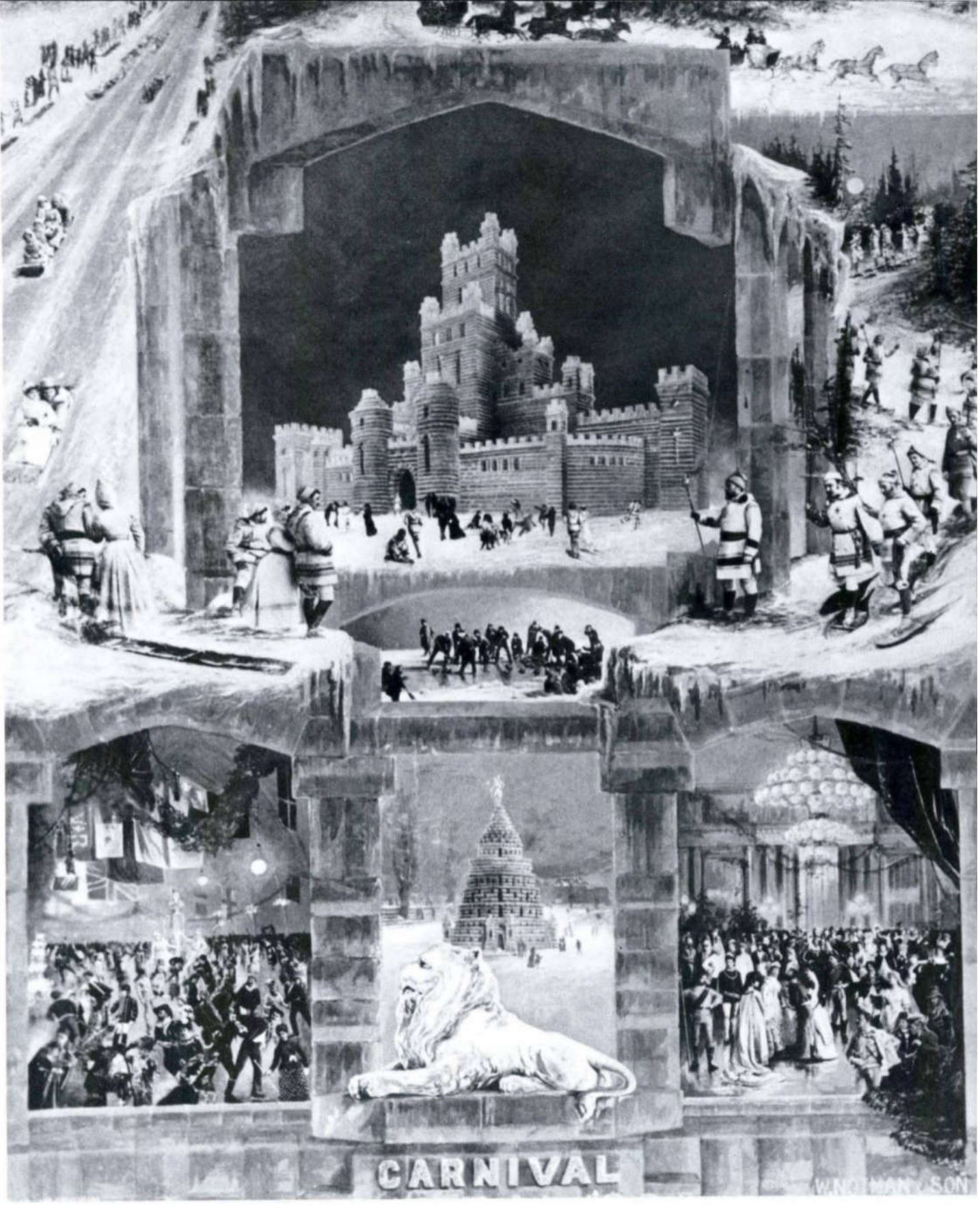
A Notman photographic montage shows the odour-free winter activities enjoyed by Victorian Montrealers. In these scenes citizens play near the 1885 ice palace at the Montreal carnival.

National Archives of Canada



University of Toronto Library

Vaccination was the one sure defence against smallpox, (la picotte).

> we sleep, and pervade the entire body of the atmosphere that we must breathe awake or asleep, at rest or in toil. The chamber and the cradle will breathe it and die; the rich and the poor will share the common fate, and graves that cover blasted lives will thicken among us. . . .

Human and animal excrement was the main problem. Dead animals, of which there were scores in the alleys and streets of all nineteenth-century cities, and the offal from butchers' shops and abattoirs also seemed particularly menacing. Pools of stagnant or polluted water were thought to generate mephitic gases, though Montreal was fortunate in enjoying excellent natural drainage and ventilation because of its location on the slopes of the mountain. Unlike many cities, it was not plagued by winds from nearby swamplands or marshes, which were thought to bear fever-causing miasmas (actually microbe-carrying mosquitoes). Smoke from factories, and from coal fireplaces in houses, was *not* seen or smelled as a menace to public health. Only the more richly odoriferous emanations from soapworks, glue factories, tanneries, and other particularly smelly industries, seemed menacing. If these odours could be limited, if the sewers were kept in good odour so that poisonous gases did not form down there in any concentration, if the city clamped down on stinking outhouses and cess-pools and cleaned its streets and lanes of other garbage, and if quarantine measures stopped the cholera from getting up the St. Lawrence, it might be possible to avoid another visitation of disease and death.

While Montrealers were cleaning up their city in fear of cholera, a quite different disease, smallpox, entered the community from the west (the carrier was a conductor out of Chicago on the Grand Trunk Railroad). It spread slowly, first at Hôtel-Dieu hospital, then among poor French-Canadians in nearby neighbourhoods. Smallpox had not been seen in the city since 1881, but had been endemic in Montreal in the 1870s and it was not until mid-summer that citizens realized that they faced a much greater menace from the "loathesome" smallpox than the "dreaded" cholera.

They redoubled their concern about bad odours. In the case of smallpox this was a completely misplaced alarm mechanism, because the virus was transmitted only on contact with a patient's breath, bedclothes, or other artifacts in which it might temporarily lodge. The way to defeat smallpox was through strict quarantine, rigorous disinfection, and, above all, vaccination

PICOTTE!

Dr Latimer, Queen's Hôtel, vient d'introduire un remède certain contre la picotte. On est garant de tout danger en portant sur soi son Sachet rose.
Dépôt général chez F. GAUTHIER, No 38 RUE ST-LAURENT.
18 161

— a practice widely used in the Western world since its popularization by Dr. Edward Jenner in the late 1790s.

Many — probably most — Montrealers did not understand how smallpox was transmitted, and clung to older, miasmatic assumptions. These were reinforced by three factors. One was the nauseating fact that smallpox victims exuded one of the most disgusting stenches known to man or physician, a smell most commonly described as "unforgettable". The second factor was the way in which the miasmatic view, so deeply held by earlier generations of public health advocates, played into the hands of everyone who disliked vaccination. If smallpox could be attacked through sanitary measures directed at purifying the air, there would be no need to subject people to the sometimes risky, often frightening and painful surgical procedure of being innoculated with the cowpox, or vaccinia virus. Dislike of vaccination was particularly widespread among French-Canadian Montrealers.

Montreal became fully alarmed about its smallpox epidemic in mid-August when the newspapers revealed there had been more than 150 deaths. "A blind man might find his way to St. Jean Baptiste" (the poor suburban village where the disease was most concentrated) "by simply following his nose", the *Star* wrote in an August 15 story sounding the tocsin. The stench from St. Jean Baptiste's streets was "simply abominable. Filthy, putrid matter has been lying in the gutters at either side of the street, exhaling the most disgusting smells, while the stench from some of the outhouses is almost unbearable."

Within a few days all of Montreal and most of the outside world was alert to the plague inflicting itself on the city. There was a run on disinfectants, including deodorizers and aromatics that "disinfected" by

An illustration from the "Canadian Illustrated News" shows "The Mayor and the Board of Health". A caption reads "Hold tight, Mr. Mayor, or the imps of death will slip from their leashes and devour us."

removing bad smells. "Citizens walk in fear and trembling through streets the usual unsavory odours of which are now mingled with whiffs of carbolic acid, thymo-cresol, chloride of lime and camphor," the *Gazette* noted. Street vendors sold pocket sachets of camphor. A party of American tourists awaiting a train connection in St. Lambert on the south shore wrapped their throats in cloths saturated with camphor to protect themselves from "smallpox air" being wafted across the river. Montreal newspapers printed innumerable complaints about putrid places — the vacant lots where butchers dumped their illicit offal in the dead of night, the stinking water closets in the Grand Trunk's Bonaventure Station ("Death's Right Bower" according to the *Herald*), the "pest hole" of Ste. Anne's market.

Enlightened Montrealers knew that vaccination was a sufficient preventative of smallpox, and they acted accordingly (though, of course, it was only prudent to continue to beware of reeks). Out of fear and ignorance, many other citizens, including some quack anti-vaccinationists, blamed the epidemic on bad smells. East End alderman Hormidas Jeannotte, for example, whose Ste-Marie ward was being decimated by smallpox, told City Council that his people believed the disease was caused by miasmas from rendering, glue, and soap factories. Some of the French-Canadian newspapers thought that bad drainage in the low-lying French quarters of the city was probably causing gasses to issue from the sewers, spreading smallpox.

This was a hard argument to sustain inasmuch as the very worst-drained parts of Montreal were inhabited by the well-vaccinated, virtually smallpox-free Irish community. But it did cause civic officials to inspect the sewers to see if concentrations of gasses had somehow formed. When city surveyor P.W. St. George led reporters on a tour of the main "Coteau Barron" sewer, the last thing he handed out before the descent was long cheroots. "Keep smoking if you value your lives", the visitors to the fetid underworld were told. The tobacco smoke would neutralize the poisonous odours.

A nurse who stayed with a smallpox-stricken family would go outdoors only late at night and stay well away from passers-by on the streets. "Moreover, he smokes nearly all the time", it was noted. Good odours drove out bad. "Beware of Odorless Disinfectants!!!!" ran an ad for Thymo-Cresal. "They are a delusion, and are generally INERT. Water might be used with equally good results." M.T. Gauthier, perfumer of 38 Rue St.-Laurent, sold special "Pastilles du Serail" ("Turkish harem pills") "pour parfumer les appartements contre le CHOLERA et LA PICOTTE".

Of course it was the civic smallpox hospital itself that seemed to contain the highest concentration of death-dealing vapours. Here was the heart of the foul sickness, and many citizens believed that smallpox germs were carried downwind from the hospital into adjacent neighbourhoods. The ramshackle hospital on the south-eastern slope of the mountain was hopelessly inadequate, but there were intense protests against every proposal to locate a new one somewhere else. No one wanted the smells of smallpox in their back yard. When Montreal's desperate Board of Health finally seized buildings on the provincial exhibition grounds and converted them to emergency hospitals, armed militiamen had to be posted in case of attack from residents of the surrounding villages.

Who shall catch them first, Death or the Doctor?

University of Toronto Library

National Archives of Canada

With the coming of winter the smells and, coincidentally, the epidemic, vanished from Montreal.

There was no smallpox down at the waterfront at Joe Beef's famous Canteen. Some must have thought that the stink from the buffalo and bears Joe kept drove away the smallpox. His patrons seem hardly to have noticed those smells. Few of the families of smallpox victims — the vast majority of whom were poor French-Canadians — complained about odours in their residences which at times overwhelmed even Board of Health workers. Many ordinary Montrealers still had, in Corbin's phrase, a high "threshold for tolerance of stench".

(How else to explain the scenes of mourning earlier that year when, after forty-five years of burial, the remains of Bishop Lartigue were exhumed and laid in state next to those of the recently-deceased Bishop Bourget. Hundreds of the faithful pressed their heads to the faces of the corpses. Unless masked by embalmer's perfumes, Mgr. Lartigue's odour of sanctity must have been very strong.)

We sometimes make fun of today's olfactory intolerance. In the nineteenth century a heightened sense of smell was a sign of modernization and an indispensable aid in the cleaning up of Canadian cities. Ironically, in Montreal in 1885 the mistaken identification of smallpox and bad smells played into the hands of those who were too fearful or ignorant or fatalistic to support vaccination, and helped make the epidemic much worse than it might have been.

The smallpox burned itself out in Montreal only after the whole population had either been vaccinated or otherwise scarred by the disease. About thirty-two hundred people had died of smallpox in the City of Montreal, many hundreds more in the suburbs. By coincidence the epidemic ended as the cold of winter returned. All of the year's bad odours went away along with the smallpox. Those who sniffed very carefully, though, might still catch the foul scent of a ghastly tragedy. ◆

Michael Bliss' book-length history of Montreal during the smallpox epidemic of 1885 is entitled "Plague: A Story of Smallpox in Montreal," published by Harper & Collins (1991).

Keyboards for Canadians

By Wayne Kelly

The oldest musical instruments in this country are the percussive shakers and rattles that accompanied ancient aboriginal ceremony. To this musical heritage European immigrants in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries added woodwinds, lutes, viols, and guitars. The earliest reference to a keyboard instrument is found in a Quebec City Jesuit journal that documents the arrival of a French organ in February 1661 with a second organ following in 1663.

More than 100 years pass before Canadian music history records any further references to keyboard instruments apart from allusions to early clerical use, but in 1776 one Friedrich Glackemeyer, an apparently capable, professional German musician, arrived in Quebec and in the winter of 1783 began offering music instruction to a local family. Until then two female pupils had been relegated to "a miserable old spinet which they had bought at Three Rivers, there being only one piano in all Quebec."

Glackemeyer quickly created a base of music students and a desire for ownership of instruments. By 1788 he proudly advertised that he was able to fulfill such desires and supply several musical items to the population. His ad in the Quebec *Gazette* read: "Two new excellent Piano Fortes with a neat leather cover warranted to be of best tone and to stand in tune a long time . . . the best Harpsichord, Piano Forte and Guitar strings . . . Tuneing hammers and Pitch Forks."

By June 1789 the first Canadian music school was established in Montreal. In a newspaper notice in September of that year, patrons of the arts were advised: "Mr. Mechtler begs leave to inform the Ladies and Gentlemen of Montreal that he has settled himself in this city as a MUSIC MASTER, and intends to teach the FORTE PIANO, HARPSICHORD and VIOLIN: he therefore flatters himself that he will meet with encouragement from those Ladies and Gentlemen who may please employ him."

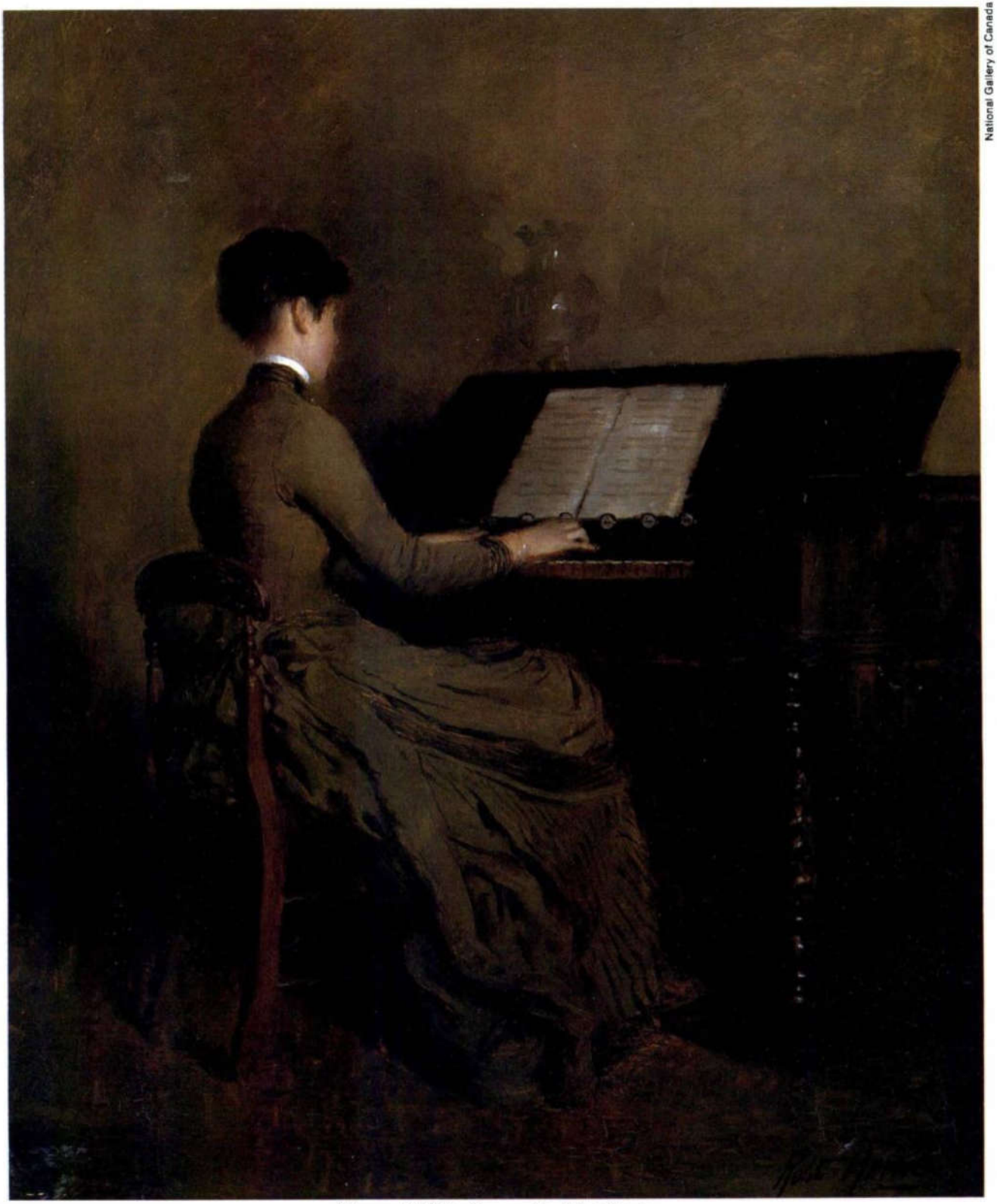
While a growing number of teachers began offering private music instruction throughout Quebec and Ontario, it was the slow appearance of regulated teaching standards that drew ever-increasing interest in keyboard artistry. Historian Timothy McGee states that "music instruction in the public school system began with the appointment of James P. Clarke to the Toronto Normal School in 1847. Halifax put music into the school curriculum in 1867, and by the end of the century schools in many of the larger cities offered music classes." The availability of quality instruction was a main reason why Canada's mid-nineteenth century population became capable of supporting a musical-instrument industry.

That music was becoming a sophisticated business in Canada during this period is further confirmed by McGee, who suggests that "an important indication of the growth of musical activity in Canada during the nineteenth century was the increasing number of people making a living in music. Aside from performers, this included vocal and instrumental teachers, as well as merchants selling instruments and books of music. Music publishing houses opened in Halifax, Saint John, Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton, and by Confederation they had published over six hundred works by Canadian and foreign composers."

The earliest known pianoforte builder in Canada was a German craftsman, Friedrich Hund, who constructed several instruments in Quebec City in 1816. By 1827 the firm of Mead, Mott & Co. was active in Montreal and it maintained a lucrative business there until 1853. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Ontario also witnessed the arrival of many talented European craftsmen who established small piano businesses from 1830 to 1850.

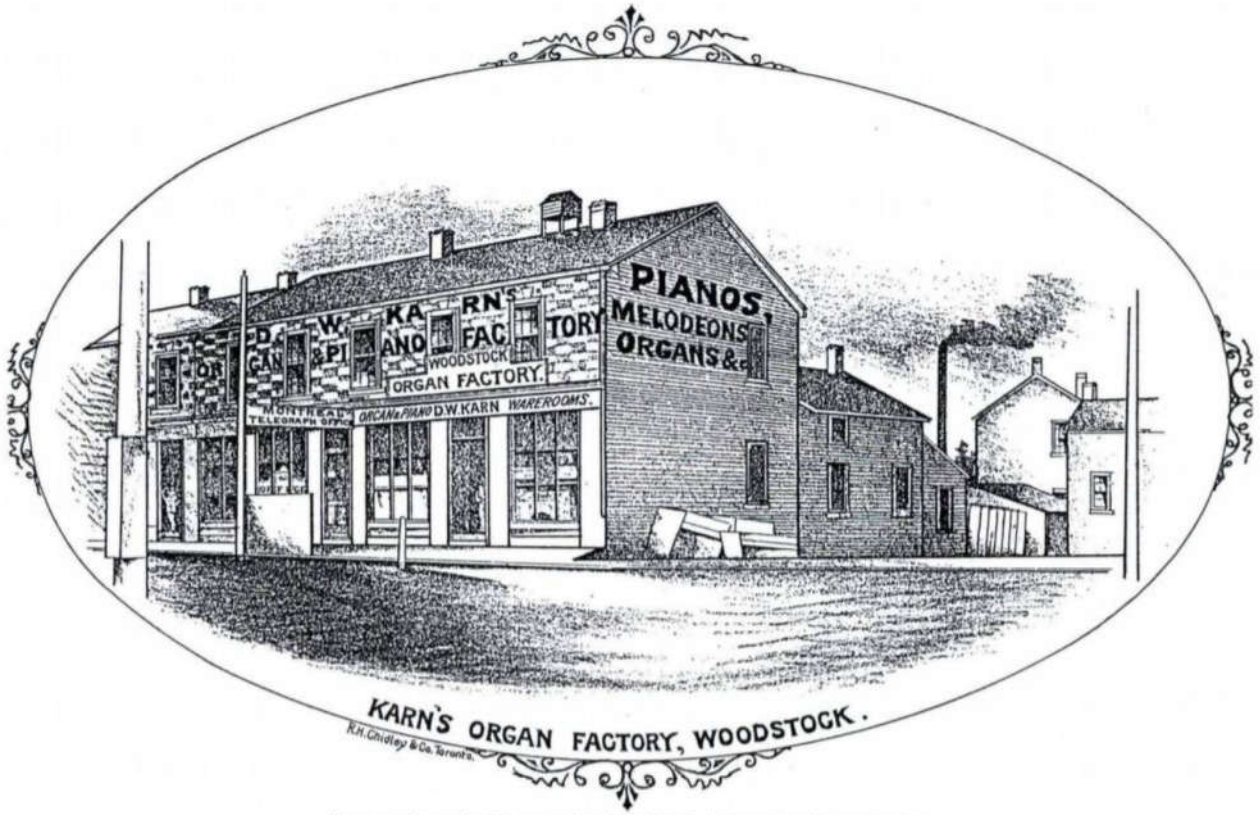
The immigration of numerous German piano craftsmen to North America had a dramatic influence on our fledgling industry. Musicologist Alfred Dolge, writing in 1911, asserted that twenty-two contemporary American firms were of German origin. And while no country-of-origin statistics are available for Canadian firms, the influence of German tradesmen was no doubt proportionate throughout the Canadian industry and is confirmed by the abundance of German names appearing in company records and patent files.

Musical instruments frequently made the arduous journey with the early white settlers of Western Canada and the North. As early as 1833 a piano pleased the



National Gallery of Canada

"Harmony" (1886), oil on wood by Robert Harris.



Drawing from the "Historical Atlas of Oxford County" (Ontario), 1876.

soldiers at Red River and several more domestically-produced square pianos had arrived there by the mid-1840s.

Letitia Hargrave, wife of James Hargrave, a Hudson's Bay Company official at York Factory, was provided with a piano by her indulgent husband. She described it in a letter to her mother in September 1840:

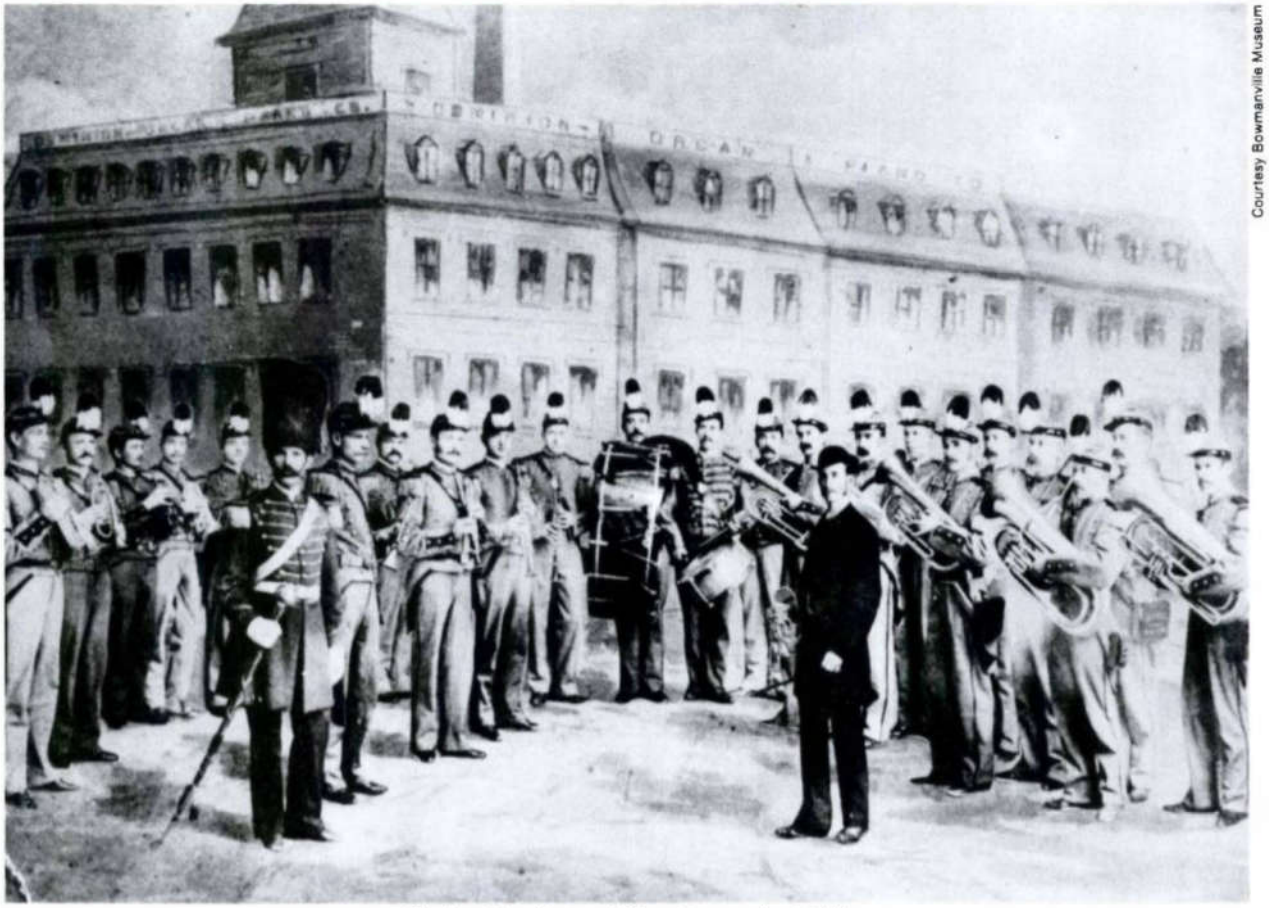
> I had nearly forgot my piano. It is a very fine one & the handsomest I ever saw. The wood is beautiful & Mr Finlay[son] is croaking for one the same. Mrs F does not play except to accompany herself. I was astonished at its appearance as I did not expect the case to be any great thing. The hinge of the lid, & the lock have created a sensation among the geniuses here from the uncommon elegance of their contrivance & mechanism. There was not a scratch upon it nor a note out of tune. The form of the pedal is magnificent & the wood beautifully marked.

The 1888 report of a correspondent of the *Music Journal* tells of music-making in rural Manitoba:

> On his arrival here in 1882 your correspondent found only one miserable little melodeon and two pianos in the whole place. In 1883 our Methodist friends advanced a step and invested in a very fair reed organ, the English Church people shortly after following suit. The same year witnessed a large increase in the town, not only of musical instruments, but of talent. In 1884 the Presbyterians, following the good example of the other churches, purchased a good reed organ. The town could then boast of seven organs and eight pianos. Towards the end of this year we organized the "Birtle Musical and Dramatic Club." From then till the spring of 1887 things went smoothly, new organs and fresh talent appearing every month or two. Early in the spring of 1887 the Presbyterians substituted a small but good "pipe organ" for the reed organ they had hitherto used. They now claim to have the only pipe organ in the country west of Winnipeg.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, "The 1851 census lists 4 individual piano builders or companies in Toronto, 10 in Montreal and 3 in Quebec City. By the year of Confederation larger piano manufacturing firms were being established." (Prior to the mid-1860s, however, almost all piano companies consisted of a single craftsman, who, with perhaps one assistant, produced one or two instruments a month.)

Musical interests in Canada have historically mirrored immigration patterns. From the early seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, French folk songs and



Courtesy Bowmanville Museum

The Dominion Organ and Piano Company band, 1884

a small amount of clerical music were dominant. But following the British victory on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, and the subsequent arrival of Loyalists from the Thirteen Colonies, chamber music, band concerts, song recitals, and opera performances gained speedy popularity.

As author Clifford Ford suggests in the introduction to *Canada's Music: A Historical Survey*:

> It must be kept in mind that the social makeup of the immigrant groups had a decisive effect on the type of musical performances . . . The greatest bulk of the immigrants [1600-1760] belonged to the rural lower class, where folk music naturally would abound, whereas a sizeable number of immigrants [1760-1900] later came from the middle class, from which amateur music-making, musical craftsmanship and music teaching were derived.

The year 1991 marks the 175th anniversary of piano building in Canada. Unfortunately, no Canadian piano manufacturers are now extant.

On Saturday, 9 January 1988, after months of negotiations with federal and provincial ministries, the Ontario Development Corporation, and assorted financial institutions, the assets of the last piano manufacturer in Canada fell to the auctioneer's gavel. At a large, two-storey yellow-brick factory in Clinton, Ontario, several thousand people had gathered: some quiet and nostalgic because they remembered what used to be; others were sad because they and their fathers and their fathers' fathers had worked there; others were there because they hoped to bid on one of the hundreds of partially assembled instruments.

The Sherlock-Manning Piano Company Ltd., successor to the W. Doherty Company which had started in Clinton in 1875, had weathered many financial storms before, having witnessed more than a dozen different principals and owners over a 112-year period. The cruel rap of the auction hammer sounded the close of an era.

For more than a century, tens of thousands of finely crafted organs, player, grand and upright pianos, and, in more recent times, a dozen different models of apartment-size pianos had left these doors and been shipped all across Canada and to every corner of the world. In 1913 Doherty instruments were found in the United States, South America, Europe and every part

Murray Drabier collection

An idealized view of the Doherty piano factory, Clinton, Ontario, circa 1910.

of the British Empire. Even the Czar of Russia was said to have one. Not long after Sherlock-Manning bought the Doherty operation in 1920 and added several new piano models, the company was one of the largest piano exporters in Canada.

The Sherlock-Manning Piano Company had not been alone. In the past 175 years, close to 220 individual organ and piano manufacturers have come and gone in Canada. With 95 per cent of these operations located in south-central Ontario and the Montreal area, several thousand Canadians have worked at this trade in the industrial heartland of our country. In many cases small towns of two or three thousand people have played host to a company that for years was the major employer.

The social impact of the piano in Canada cannot be overstated. Evolving from a status symbol in the 1880s to an almost mandatory household appliance by 1910, the piano was the hearth around which generations warmed in song. As *The Economic and Industrial History of the City of London, 1855-1930* puts it, "Amusement and entertainment still centred very largely in the home. Music was a great attraction for young and old alike. Those who could neither play nor sing could enjoy listening. A group of young people in the home brightened the evening with song and instrument. If friends dropped in to spend the evening, music always had its place in the entertainment provided."

The piano was the first and only form of creative expression most households would know. Many hours each week were spent around the instrument. In schools, lodges, church basements, community halls, and public buildings in every corner of every province the piano was a piece of standard equipment.

The piano was considered so important to the Canadian household that an Ontario newspaper editor was moved to write in 1916:

> Music in the modern home has come to be a requisite of the first importance to the cultured and refined, the magnet which attracts the son and daughter to the fireside of the parents and the charm which makes home a haven to the tired mind and body after the day's trial and commercial strife. Musicless homes, according to the results of investigation, are in the majority of circumstances those forgotten by the son and daughter after a few years in the business world. The modern inventions which have been brought into action to instill a spirit of

repose and refinement in the residence — the electric light, telephone, well modelled furniture — these have played their part in the uplifting of citizenship to its present lofty plane. Yet there is one influence which has done more perhaps than any of the rest in instilling the refining influences — the organ or piano.

Most piano companies saw the early advantage of putting salesmen on the road. Orders rushed in. A Heintzman piano was baggage on the first transcontinental train — destined for the Klondike. The same company landed the first grand piano on Prince Edward Island by fishing boat.

In 1907 the small Ontario town of Uxbridge had a piano company that was in financial trouble. Flamboyant salesman Hillary McGuire swung through the circuit from Halifax to Montreal and in just twenty-eight days persuaded 125 households that an Uxbridge piano would save their children from lives of sin and degradation. About 1910 Heintzman salesman Bill Fletcher toured Ontario backroads with an upright on a horse-drawn wagon. In winking collusion with the wagon driver, he would seek out the most prosperous farms in a township, pretend to lose a wheel close by, and then insist that the farmer help move the precious instrument into his home, safe from the elements. Bill would then commence a coy recital of Brahms, Bach, and Scott Joplin. It was a rare event that the piano had to be re-loaded on the miraculously repaired wagon.

Frank Sherlock had been a traveller and salesman in the years 1911-1913. He reportedly crossed the country dozens of times by train, peddling the latest Doherty (later Sherlock-Manning) wares. Orders came in by the hundreds. The Canadian piano industry was booming.

Many of the larger Ontario manufacturers set up showrooms and retail shops in major cities in western Canada. With ever-improving rail-freight service, a boxcar of pianos shipped from Toronto could arrive in Vancouver in as little as two weeks. Mail-order pianos were popular too. The T. Eaton Company regularly offered two or three upright styles at the turn of the century and included in its catalogue elaborate half-page ads for pianos. These could be shipped to rail points anywhere in the Dominion.

There were many reasons for the rise of the Canadian piano industry. The most important was the unsatisfactory nature of imported European pianos. Because of the size and fragility of the piano, it often concluded a long Atlantic voyage in less than perfect condition. Further, since the cold, dry Canadian climate made many instruments warp, shrink, and become virtually untunable, even the best European pianos soon were not worth the price of their passage.

The other reasons involved economic change. As Canada industrialized, the increase in inventions and labour-saving devices gave rise to more leisure time. Also, the growing economic sophistication of Canada created a demand for entertainment while also increasing the amount of money available for consumer spending. The importance of both these points is emphasized by Craig H. Roell in *The Piano in America, 1890-1940*. "The rise of the piano industry highlights the transition of [North American] society from one dominated by the work ethic of the nineteenth century to one devoted to consumer culture in the twentieth. As industry and society mechanized and electrified, workers in the twentieth century laboured for fewer hours per week. Work and sacrifice became less valued in a culture that increasingly honored leisure, recreation and consumption."

The horrendous effects of the Canadian climate on nineteenth-century pianos cannot be overemphasized. The piano, an instrument of some 6,000 pieces, most of them wooden, is extremely vulnerable to changes in humidity. The early European imports to Canada were made with woods not well seasoned to withstand our dry winters. Placing them in parlours that were primarily heated with a wood or coal stove further added to the trauma of winter dryness. When spring arrived and windows were opened wide, the humidity levels from the damp days of April and May settled in piano woods. After several years of such shifting extremes, many instruments were good for little more than firewood.

Canadian piano manufacturers spent many decades and experimented with a remarkable number of designs in attempting to remedy this problem. But perhaps more than anything else, the realization that piano woods had to be kiln dried *properly* was the most important discovery that allowed the industry to produce just the right piano for the Canadian climate. By the 1890s William Doherty and his talented employees at a Clinton, Ontario, factory had learned the secret. Working with a maze of underground tunnel kilns on his property, Doherty developed a method of wood treatment that was later adopted by most Canadian piano makers.

Ad from the "Kingston City Directory", 1865.

JOHN C. FOX,

MANUFACTURER OF

PIANO-FORTES,

Cor. of King and Princess Streets,

KINGSTON, C.W.

EVERY INSTRUMENT WARRANTED.

Former Sherlock-Manning employees Murray Draper, his brother, and father spent many years with early Doherty methods of piano construction. Concerning the wood-drying systems, Draper recounts:

> In connection with drying, live steam was piped to the kilns as a heat source. Also, used exhaust steam from the engines (still hot) would be forced through the underground tunnels for extra heat and moisture. To dry lumber, heat was used to reduce the moisture content of the wood, which could hold from 40 to 60 per-cent moisture. But steam must be circulated through the boards to keep the outsides from drying out first. Ideally, a lot of steam is used the first couple of days; then, each day more heat and less steam are used so gradually the heat gets to the centre and then [the board] dries from in to out. Drying was a very important part of the system. If it was hurried to save a day or two, the results could be that later on the lumber would crack or warp and really never remain stable.

Such discoveries and ingenuity helped create pianos that not only endured in this country but have been popular in every climate on earth.

Our vast timber stands in British Columbia added immeasurably to the Canadian industry. The sounding-board — the most critical component of the piano relating to its tone — was found to be best constructed from western spruce. But not just any spruce tree would do. The enduring favourite, thin sheets of solid Sitka spruce, have come from the north side of trees growing on the north side of mountains. The extra cold and lack of sunlight on such tree sides mean little branch growth, and so a clear wood free from knots and uniform in grain was available. Many piano companies in the past (and even the Yamaha Music Company of Japan today) have purchased timber rights for such stands of B.C. spruce.

Creative thinking and mechanical brilliance have been a hallmark of the Canadian piano industry throughout its history. While numerous British and American patents had been granted to Canadian manufacturers prior to Confederation, the first piano patent (#242) was filed under the country's new patent legislation on 29 December 1869. Since then scores of inventions have been registered to the piano makers of Canada.

By the early 1840s budding inventors Abraham and Samuel Nordheimer had opened a piano dealership in Kingston. Their years of experience in handling European and American imports would eventually move them to produce their own fine-quality instruments. Thomas Mason, Vincent Risch, Octavius Newcombe, Alexander Willis, William Doherty, Louis Pratte, Dennis Karn, Theodore Heintzman, Frank Sherlock, Wilbur Manning, Damase Lesage, Gerhard Heintzman, and many other talented inventors would likewise enter the trade before the close of the nineteenth century.

Since the modest efforts of German immigrant Friedrich Hund in his small Quebec City shop in 1816, several hundred Canadian companies have produced instruments that have brought joy to the lives of explorers and prospectors, prairie pioneers and urban dwellers all over this land. Some of these businesses were small, private workshops. Some were corporations employing hundreds of people. Many of Canada's piano makers, as early newcomers to this country, arrived with generations of talent and inventiveness in their backgrounds. Our piano builders have made towns thrive and cities proud. With quality instruments finding homes in virtually every corner of the world, Canadian pianos and organs earned a reputation for excellence unsurpassed by anything else that has ever left our shores. ◆

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Guelph, Ontario.
OVER 75,000 OF OUR INSTRUMENTS NOW IN USE.
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Ad from the "Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine," 1895.

Wayne Kelly lives in Lucan, Ontario. Portions of this article are excerpts from his most recent book "Downright Upright! A History of the Canadian Piano Industry" (Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., 1991). He is also the author of "The Crokinole Book" (Boston Mills Press, 1988).

A Peal of Bells for a Poet

By HUBERT G. MAYES

One hundred years ago — on 17 December 1891 — the bells of St. Boniface Cathedral rang out in the frosty Manitoba air to celebrate the birthday of John Greenleaf Whittier. *The Red River Voyageur*, a poem written about forty years earlier by Whittier, had given literary immortality to Saint Boniface, the Red River and the colourful figure of the voyageur. Lieutenant-Governor John Christian Schultz and Archbishop Alexandre-Antonin Taché had decided that the ringing of the bells would be a fitting way to pay tribute to Whittier, who was by then an old man and in poor health. Ordinarily the bells were not rung after the evening Angelus, but for this special occasion Taché was happy to break with tradition.

According to Whittier's biographer, Samuel T. Pickard, J.W. Taylor, who had been the American consul in Winnipeg since 1870, sent a letter to Whittier in which he informed the poet that "at midnight, with the last stroke of the clock ushering in the seventeenth day of December 1891, the eighty-fourth anniversary of his birth, the bells of Saint Boniface, commemorated in his beautiful lyric *The Red River Voyageur*, rang a joyous peal, at the suggestion of Lieutenant-Governor John Schultz and by the direction of his Grace Archbishop Taché." Several months later Whittier wrote the following letter of appreciation to the Archbishop:

Newburyport, Mass. March 5, 1892

My Dear Friend:

During my illness from the prevailing epidemic which confined me nearly the whole winter, and from which I am but very slowly recovering, a letter from the United States Consul at Winnipeg informed me of thy pleasant recognition of my little poem, *The Red River Voyageur* (written nearly forty years ago) by the ringing of the bells of St. Boniface on the eve of my late anniversary.

I was at the time unable to respond, but I feel that I should be wanting in due appreciation of such a marked compliment, if I did not even at this late hour, express to thee my heartfelt thanks.

I have reached an age when literary success and manifestations of popular favor have ceased to satisfy one upon whom the solemnity of life's sunset is resting, but such a delicate and beautiful tribute has deeply moved me. I shall hear the bells of St. Boniface sounding across the Continent and awakening a feeling of gratitude for thy generous act.

With renewed thanks and the prayer that our Heavenly Father may continue to make thee largely instrumental in His service,

I am, gratefully and respectfully thy friend,

John G. Whittier

Whittier remarks that his poem had been written "nearly forty years ago", but in collections of his poems the date is given as 1859. One wonders if he ever knew that a year later (December 1860) the cathedral of the "turrets twain" depicted in his poem was destroyed by fire. The cathedral which replaced it in 1862, and from which the bells rang in his honour in 1891, had only one central tower.

Writing in *The Beaver* of September, 1953, Harry Shave stated that *The Red River Voyageur* had been used in Manitoba school texts "periodically, if not continuously, for at least fifty-five years, and as recently as the term ending in June 1950." Hence it is part of the literary memory of Manitobans who received their schooling in the first half of this century, and the verse about "the bells of the Roman Mission that call from their turrets twain" has been very frequently quoted. However, it has been my experience that young Manitobans are generally not familiar with the poem, and it probably was never well known in other parts of Canada. For present-day readers who may be glad to have their memories refreshed or to make their first acquaintance with the poem, here it is in full:

THE RED RIVER VOYAGEUR

Out and in the river is winding
The links of its long, red chain,
Through belts of dusky pine-land
And gusty leagues of plain.

Thine truly
John G. Whittier

John Greenleaf Whittier in old age

Only, at times, a smoke-wreath
With the drifting cloud-rack joins,—
The smoke of the hunting-lodges
Of the wild Assiniboins!

Drearily blows the north-wind
From the land of ice and snow;
The eyes that look are weary,
And heavy the hands that row.

And with one foot on the water,
And one upon the shore,
The Angel of Shadow gives warning
That day shall be no more.

Is it the clang of wild-geese?
Is it the Indian's yell,
That lends to the voice of the north-wind
The tones of a far-off bell?

The voyageur smiles as he listens
To the sound that grows apace;
Well he knows the vesper ringing
Of the bells of St. Boniface.

The bells of the Roman Mission,
That call from their turrets twain,
To the boatman on the river,
To the hunter on the plain!

Even so in our mortal journey,
The bitter north-winds blow,
And thus upon life's Red River
Our hearts, as oarsmen, row.

And when the Angel of Shadow
Rests his feet on wave and shore,
And our eyes grow dim with watching
And our hearts faint at the oar,

Happy is he who heareth
The signal of his release
In the bells of the Holy City,
The chimes of eternal peace!

Whatever critics may think of the literary merits of the poem, there is no doubt that Whittier succeeded in his romantic evocation of the sights and sounds of the country through which the Red River flows. However, his description is not based on personal experience: he never saw the mid-west of Canada or the United States. His inspiration came from the diary of J. Wesley Bond, a journalist who in 1851 accompanied Governor Alexander Ramsey of Minnesota to Pembina near the Canadian border to conclude a treaty with Indians of the region. Following this event, Bond continued north by canoe along the Red River to the Red River Settlement. He was accompanied by the Reverend John Black, the first Presbyterian minister to be sent to the settlement, forty years after its establishment by Lord Selkirk. Bond's account of the journey was published in a Philadelphia newspaper, and subsequently came to the attention of Whittier. There are references in the diary to the appearance of the country, the strong north wind, the wild geese flying overhead, the paddling of the Métis canoemen and the sound of the bells of St. Boniface Cathedral. All of these must have stirred the poet's imagination and suggested the parallel with the human condition contained in the last three stanzas.

Whittier's life, like most of his poetry, is not well known to contemporary readers. He was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts in 1807, grew up on a farm and received little formal education. Early in life he achieved success as a poet, but he was also a highly regarded editor and a vigorous advocate of the abolition of slavery. Throughout his long career the Quaker principles that had been instilled in childhood molded his thoughts and actions. That he should have seen the difficult journey of the voyageur as a metaphor of the Christian's earthly struggle and the cathedral bells as a symbol of rest and peace at the end of life's turmoil is not surprising, given his deep religious convictions. He died in September of 1892, less than a year after the tribute paid to him by the ringing of the bells, and was buried in Amesbury, Massachusetts, where he had lived the greater part of his life. The man who had the bells rung did not survive him by long: Taché died in St. Boniface in 1894.

Whittier's literary output was considerable — his prose and poetry fill seven volumes. The poetry is chiefly of three types: verses which express his anti-slavery

Hudson's Bay Company
THE VOYAGEUR SMILES AS HE LISTENS
TO THE SOUND THAT GROWS APACE,
WELL HE KNOWS THE VESPER RINGING
OF THE BELLS OF SAINT BONIFACE.
THE BELLS OF THE ROMAN MISSION
THAT CALL FROM THEIR TURRETS TWAIN
TO THE BOATMAN ON THE RIVER
TO THE HUNTER ON THE PLAIN.

Above: Archbishop Taché: bells for remembrance. Right: Page from a booklet, "The Red River Voyageur", published by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1892.

convictions and his desire for social reform; poems recounting legends of New England and Europe; and pastoral poems extolling the beauty of nature and the goodness and simplicity of rural life. His longest poem, *Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl*, is generally considered to be his finest. *Ichabod*, *Telling the Bees*, and *Skipper Ireson's Ride* are also of superior quality and are frequently included in anthologies, along with five or six others. He was very widely read during his lifetime and for several decades thereafter, mainly because his homespun themes appealed to a large popular audience. But there was also acclaim from his peers: eminent writers such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold and Oliver Wendell Holmes admired the best of his work. In this century he has come to be regarded as a precursor of Robert Frost. With time, however, readers have become more intolerant of his artistic weaknesses, and his renown has greatly diminished.

For Canadians who have little affinity for nineteenth-century poetry about New England country life or the abolitionist cause, Whittier is probably little more than a name, and they would claim that his work — with the possible exception of *The Red River Voyageur* — is completely unknown to them. But if they attend, or once attended, one of the English-speaking Protestant churches, they would be wrong: they have encountered Whittier's poetry in the form of hymns. These hymns were not written as such by Whittier, but are verses from his religious poetry set to music by others. In a critical study of Whittier's work published in 1961, Lewis Leary states that more than seventy hymns by Whittier were then in use, and that the Methodist hymnal contained "more hymns by Whittier than by any other writer except Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley." Some of these hymns are still familiar. Among the best known are: ***Dear Lord and Father of mankind; O brother man, fold to thy heart thy brother; Blow, winds of God; Immortal Love, for ever full; All things are Thine*** and ***I know not what the future hath.***

It is unlikely that Whittier's literary star will ever rise again. The poet himself realized that his fame, as well as that of his literary friends, would fade with the passage of time, and concluded that "What we *are* will then be more important than what we have done or said in prose or rhyme, or what folks that we never saw or heard think of us." Nevertheless, we can be grateful to him for the admirable hymns which are still in our hymnaries, as well as for the "Canadian" poem which preserves in its imagery a glimpse of the Red River Valley as it was in the middle of the nineteenth century. Saint Boniface Cathedral no longer has its "turrets twain". Even the twin towers of Archbishop Langevin's 1908 cathedral were destroyed in the disastrous fire of 1968. But in the cherished ruins of that building, close to the entrance of the new cathedral, there is a set of fine-sounding bells. It would be fitting if they could be rung on 17 December 1991 to commemorate the "pleasant recognition" and to honour the memory of John Greenleaf Whittier. ♦

Hubert G. Mayes, a former Professor of French at the University of Winnipeg, is a frequent contributor to "The Beaver".

Halifax, 1799

The Duke of Kent's Astonishing Telegraph

By James H. Morrison

George Washington died in Virginia on 14 December 1799. While it might be reasonable to assume that the news swept rapidly across the young American republic, this was not the case. Due to the lack of an efficient and rapid communication network, news of Washington's death took ten days to reach Boston, the birthplace of the revolution. This was not an unusual delay when the rutted roads and twisted trails of late eighteenth-century America are considered. Such delays were not, however, the norm for the whole continent.

Four months before Washington's death, in September of 1799, Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, fourth son of King George III sailed into the spacious harbour of Halifax, Nova Scotia. He had come to assume his duties as Commander-in-Chief of British North America. Within twenty minutes, news of his arrival reached the community of Windsor, fifty miles away, then it spread to other Nova Scotian towns and across the Bay of Fundy to settlements in the colony of New Brunswick. Within forty-eight hours, a large number of His Majesty's subjects in these two colonies knew of Prince Edward's arrival. Yet neither a word was written nor a sentence spoken to communicate his coming. Prince Edward's arrival and the public's rapid awareness of it dramatize the remarkable efficiency of North America's first telegraph system.

The Halifax of the 1790s had been deeply involved in two imperial wars. The Seven Years War (1756-1763) and the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783) had aroused a flurry of concern for the defence of the city. However, as would be expected in this rather isolated corner of the empire, Halifax did not receive sustained financial assistance from Great Britain for military expenditures. Only when the settlement achieved strategic importance was assistance forthcoming. The French Revolution provided such a context. Halifax was to be fortified due to the possibility of a Franco-American military alliance. It was for this reason that Prince Edward was first sent to Halifax. It was his intention to transform the settlement into the most modern of military bastions. In this he was successful, for throughout the French Revolutionary Wars and much of the Napoleonic aftermath Halifax remained a stronghold for the British forces in North America and was never attacked.

Part of Edward's success was based on the establishment of a viable communication system within and beyond the defence perimeter he constructed in Halifax. In order to appreciate this system, the geography of the settlement must be briefly considered.

Halifax had been founded in 1749 to balance the French military presence in what is now Eastern Canada. It was a strategic decision. The site was on a coastal peninsula and had an excellent sheltered harbour. To defend against enemy land forces, a line of blockhouses was constructed across the neck of the peninsula, while the harbour was well fortified against an enemy from the sea. Even in the early days of settlement it was essential to establish a rapid communication system to inform the citizens of any threat to these land and sea defences. Such systems were not uncommon on the Atlantic coast. In St. John's, Newfoundland, a signal system, albeit a simple one, existed as early as 1705:

> When the lookout [Signal Hill] from either of the hills discovers any sails, they shall give notice by firing a Small cannon or Paterero and hoisting the colours, if weather permit, and discharging as many muskets as sails shall be discovered, which shall be observed at the fort by hoisting the colours, and returning as many small shot.

Some similar system was no doubt in operation in the new settlement of Halifax, though what this system was is not known. It was probably connected with the lighthouse built on Sambro Island at the mouth of the harbour in 1758. Communications would have been crucial due to the threats from first the French and later the Americans and French during the Revolutionary War.

Prince Edward, fourth son of George III and later Duke of Kent, arrived in Halifax in May of 1794 for a second stint in British North America, this time as commander of His Majesty's Forces in Halifax. When he arrived a simple signal system was in existence which

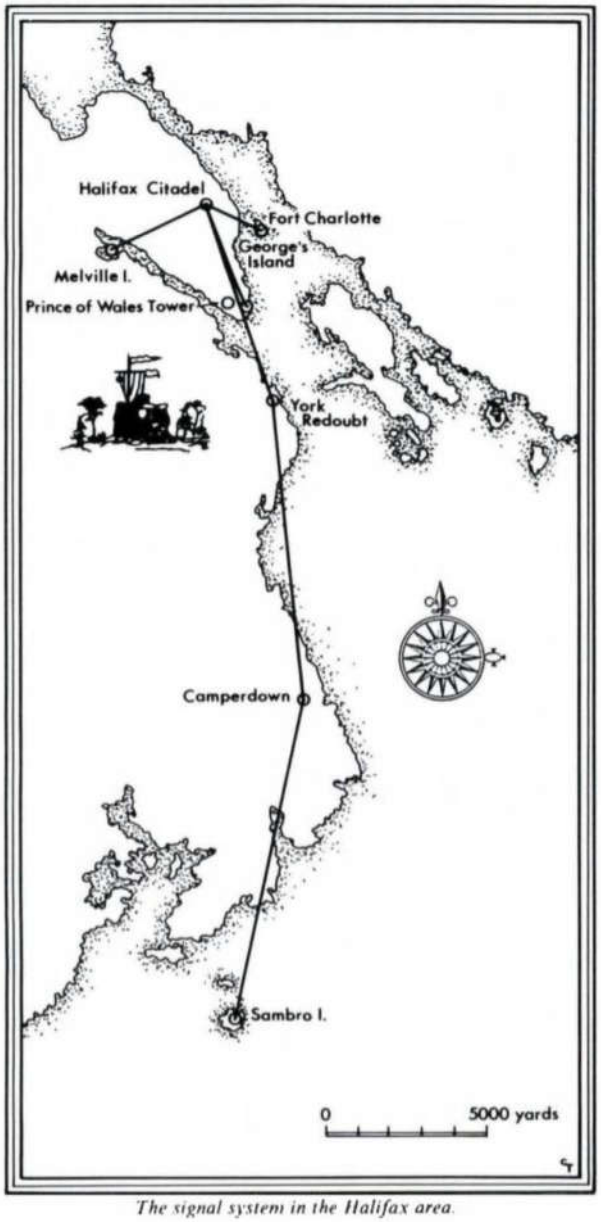
On page 24: The Duke of Kent (father of Queen Victoria). Above: York Redoubt, near Halifax, showing a signal mast with wicker ball markers.

utilized flags, balls, and pennants. No numerical code was used nor was a complicated code book really necessary. The entirety of what was sent by this system dealt only with the size, origin and, nationality of incoming ships. The Duke of Kent was to introduce a more intricate system that could be used well beyond the coast and could transmit messages of much greater complexity.

Work was begun on the Prince of Wales Tower, Fort Charlotte, and York Redoubt, all of which were outforts in the immediate vicinity of Halifax. Halifax soon had a completely revised defence system with the nerve centre being the Citadel built on a hill overlooking the harbour and the sea approaches as well as the immediate land area. Named Fort George, the Citadel, by its very location, was a remarkable defensive structure. But it was of little use without the capability to communicate with the outposts. Edward's most important innovation in this regard was the telegraph system centred at Fort George. Halifax was to have two complementary signalling systems, one to regulate the harbour traffic and the other to communicate with the troops defending the city.

Harry Piers, in his study *The Evolution of the Halifax Fortress, 1749-1928*, states that Prince Edward introduced the ball signal system to Halifax, a system which had been adopted by the British in 1795. It was the first of its kind in North America. Edward's system was derived from other communication devices already in use in the Royal Navy. British authorities, however, had shown great interest in various communication methods long before 1795.

England and other European nations, between 1600 and the last half of the eighteenth century, were being transformed by a period of alternating expansion and consolidation. They squabbled incessantly over new lands claimed and conquered. The sea was the battleground for colonial expansion and the nation with the most efficient fleet could extend its empire. As sea tactics became important and ships went from the simple process of ramming each other to co-ordinating their offensives, the accuracy and swiftness of communications became vital. Lieutenant Edward W. Very U.S.N. writing in the *Naval Encyclopedia* (1881) credits the Duke of York (later King James II of England) with first establishing a signal code with a regular system in the Dutch War of 1665. This system is surmised to have been based on specific flags raised on various parts of a ship to signify a communication. Before this, only a few reports or stated orders could be transmitted by a signal system of lights, flags, and guns. It was not until the 1780s that there would be



The signal system in the Halifax area.

a substantial change in sea and land communication techniques.

The eighteenth century had been marked by intense competition between European powers, especially France and Britain, for control of the colonies. Generally the waging of war had become less defensive and victory usually went to the army or fleet which took quick and decisive offensive action. In this regard rapid communication was a prerequisite to triumph.

Between 1780 and 1783, a new plan of communications was devised which would eventually replace the positional flag system. It consisted of using more flags and showing them in various combinations. A combination of flags would mean that a greater number and variety of signals could be sent. Detailed code books of numbers and their appropriate messages were printed. There was no standard system, however, as each captain seems to have worked out his own signals. It wasn't until Lord Howe's Code in 1782 that the British navy used a standard code for ships at sea. In addition a code of lantern signals for night communication was also adopted.

Coincidental with the innovations in the naval signalling system was the development of a rapid and accurate land communication system. Flags, balls and mechanical arms were the mediums by which messages were transmitted using alphabetical and numerary signalling. Two manual telegraph systems for land had been devised in Europe by 1794. The first was invented in France by Claude Chappe and was known as the semaphore system. The other manual telegraph, invented by an Englishman, Lord Murray, was based on a shutter device.

A chain of stations based on the Murray shutter telegraph was quickly erected between London and Deal (70 miles east of London). Others were added from London to Yarmouth, Portsmouth and Plymouth, all for the purpose of warning London of a French invasion. The Murray telegraph was also used in Denmark and also spread to the United States where a number of towns set up an exact copy of his shutter telegraph. These lasted in the United States and Britain until the mid-nineteenth century. The land and sea systems would eventually merge in a new form due to the work of Rear Admiral Sir Home Riggs Popham. It was he who designed two systems, flag and arm waving semaphores, which could be used on land and at sea. The first edition of Popham's *Telegraphic Signals* was published in 1800. By 1816 Popham's manual applied to all Royal Navy vessels and in 1817 it was adopted for the merchant marine. On land Popham's semaphore had begun to replace the shutters of Lord Murray. This however was all to occur some years after the Duke of Kent's innovation in Halifax in the waning years of the eighteenth century.

Prince Edward was no doubt familiar with the existence of the various types of contemporary land and sea telegraphs described above. The system he introduced consisted of a series of flags and black balls of wicker material raised on the mast and yard-arms of a flagstaff in a pre-arranged coded sequence. The message was read by the distant signal station with the aid of a telescope. At night a simpler code with lanterns was used. Edward's signal codes were perhaps not too dissimilar from the coastal signal ports in Great Britain and Ireland which "communicated with men-of-war by means of a system of balls and flags."

Edward was a bureaucratic meddler but, to be fair, let him tell it: "I never consider anything that happens

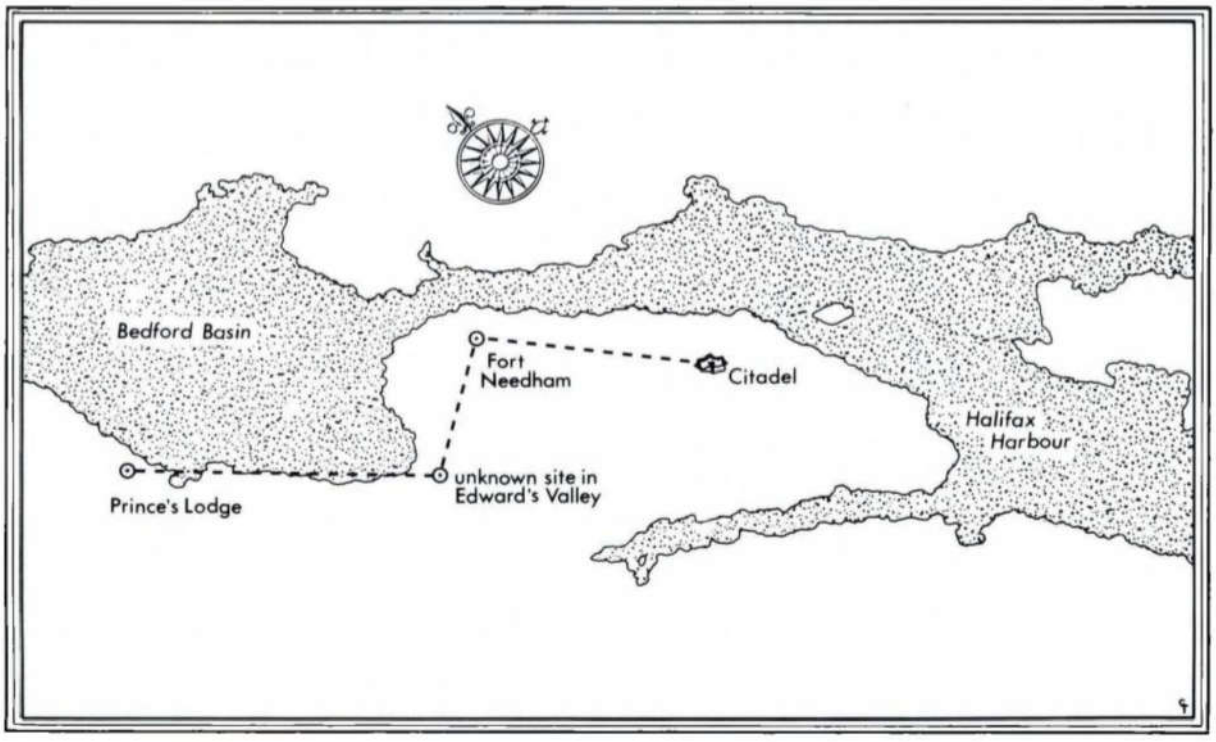
with my command and that is connected with the King's service, as below my notice or attention." One can imagine the implications of such a statement when Edward became Commander-in-Chief of British North American forces. It was soon obvious to him that what was of primary importance was the defence of the Halifax harbour. Thus, a visual telegraph was introduced to connect the Halifax Citadel with the outposts.

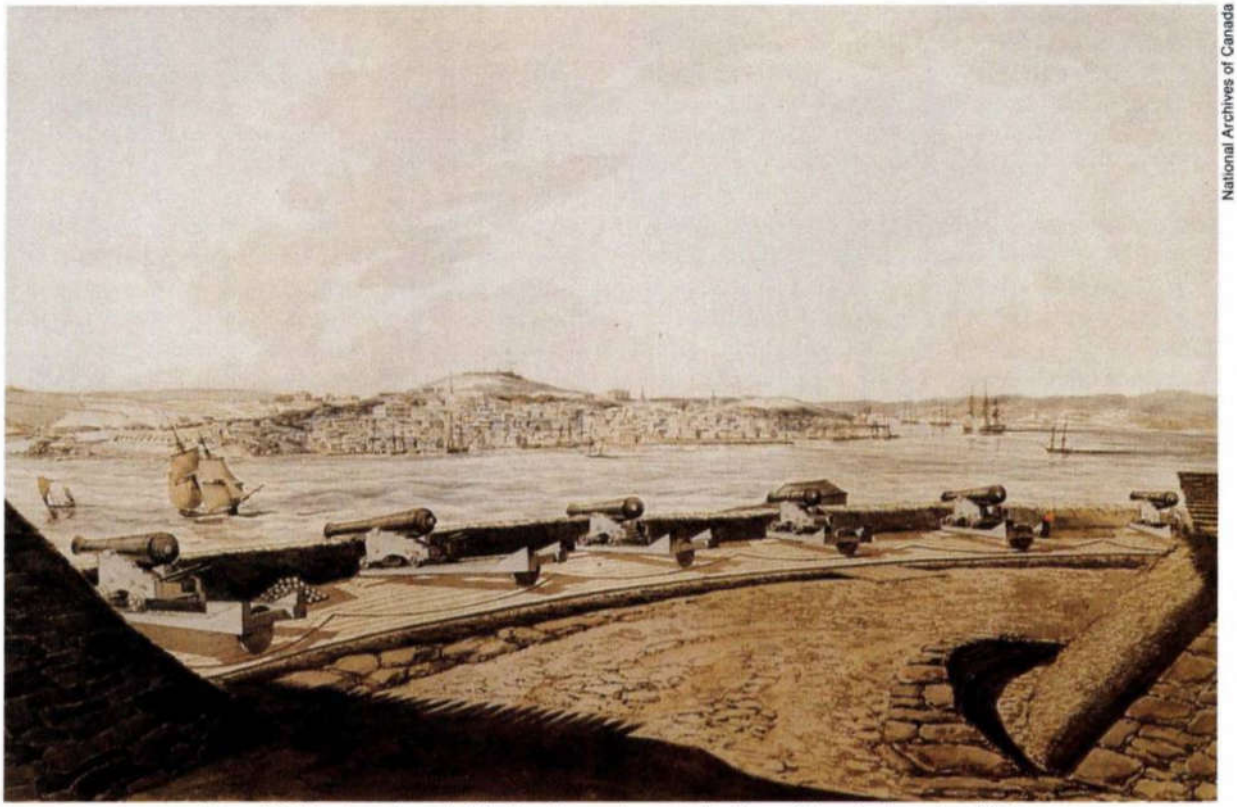
Initially, the Kent innovation began at the Citadel, then to York Redoubt and on to Chebucto Head, which in 1798 was replaced by Camperdown. Probably the termination point of the telegraph system was the Sambro Island lighthouse. This was the primary route; and as the energetic Edward added each new fortification, adaptations and additions were made in the visual signal network. It no doubt communicated to the Prince of Wales martello tower in Point Pleasant Park and by 1800 to Melville Island where the British army prison was situated. Such outposts were manned by at least six men at a time who performed their signalling duties on a rotational basis. They were drawn from various regiments such as the Royal Nova Scotia Regiment which had been posted to Halifax. In the late eighteenth century a specialized signal corps in the British army had yet to be developed and would not exist for almost another century.

Using the descriptions of William Tonge, A.D.C. and Town Major in Halifax, the signalling system used in Halifax would appear to be similar to that used in Quebec in 1809, although perhaps at an earlier evolutionary stage. Tonge in a letter dated 28 February 1802 to Major General G.S. Smythe in Halifax refers in a complimentary way to the new system of telegraphs "the erection of which is calculated in the simplest and most aeconomical [*sic*] Principle." A minimum of five balls were needed and could be used to send both alphabetic and numerary signals. The balls were to be hung below the East and West yard-arms in set positions which would indicate the numbers between 1-99. In addition, if a flag was raised at the mast-head 100 was added to the number shown; a flag at the half-mast, 200 was added; a flag at the east yard-arm, 300 was added and one at the west yard-arm, 400 was added. The number 499 is the limit of the number system used in Halifax. Tonge's letter also included specific signal numbers to be used and their meaning. For example, #259 meant "A Court Martial tomorrow", #294 "Vessel in Quarantine" and #326 "Your orders are executed." Compared to the Quebec signalling system of 1809 the Halifax ball and flag signals were not nearly as extensive. However, they would appear to be sufficient for Prince Edward.

Edward, however, was not satisfied with Fort George as the only communication centre. During his stay in Halifax, he added his own private telegraph system. Happily ensconced in the Governor of Nova Scotia's retirement home on the Bedford Basin, he was kept informed of the activities of his subjects by telegraph

Signals could easily be sent to the Duke at his residence on Bedford Basin.





National Archives of Canada

View of Halifax from George's Island, etching and aquatint by George Isham Parkyns, circa 1801. The signal masts are visible on the Citadel.

and was in close touch with his men. He could, in fact, command from that site. It was possible for Edward to be " . . . informed of any occurrence in five minutes by telegraph, and, if necessary be in town in fifty minutes." The telegraph station was located in one of the early Halifax blockhouses which was situated in a commanding position on Bedford Basin. The blockhouse was repaired and altered. It consisted of a structure twenty feet in height, supporting a flagstaff with yard-arms. Although it was only six miles from the Citadel, a direct view was impossible. Consequently, there were two relay stations, one at the neck of the peninsula (this side of the present-day suburb of Fairview) and the second at Fort Needham. From Fort Needham a message could be relayed to the Citadel. It was received at Fort George by the men who operated the telegraph staff, which was situated on the roof at the south end of the Cavalier Barracks.

Not content to restrict his "instantaneous" command to Halifax and its environs, Edward was intent on extending it throughout Nova Scotia and New Brunswick as well. In the summer of 1797, the coast of British North America was being threatened by French privateers. Rumours of a French invasion could cause as much panic as the actual attempt and quick, accurate military intelligence was essential. Therefore, Edward arranged for telegraph stations to be erected from Halifax to Windsor. By 1798, such stations stretched to the community of Annapolis. The dispatch of a fast boat allowed the telegraph connection to be picked up again in Saint John and messages were then transmitted by visual telegraph to Fredericton. At times the connection was almost instantaneous as in the case cited when the Duke of Kent arrived in Halifax in September 1799 to take up his position as Commander-in-Chief of British North America. The public of the two provinces was informed of the royal party's arrival within forty-eight hours. All this occurred at a time when a letter would have taken some three or four weeks to cover the same distance.

Two months after the above message was conveyed, another important communication was passed between the telegraph stations. Simeon Perkins, in his diary entry of 25 November 1799, noted its arrival and even more importantly, its rapid dispersal to other areas of Nova Scotia.

> . . . they have news at Shelburne of Cessation of Hostilities, which came in the pacquet, and was sent to Annapolis by Telegruaph [*sic*] in six hours, and came to Shelburne by a vessel from Argyle.

The distance from Halifax to Annapolis over what then passed as a road was about 150 miles, making an average speed of 25 miles per hour, which is some-

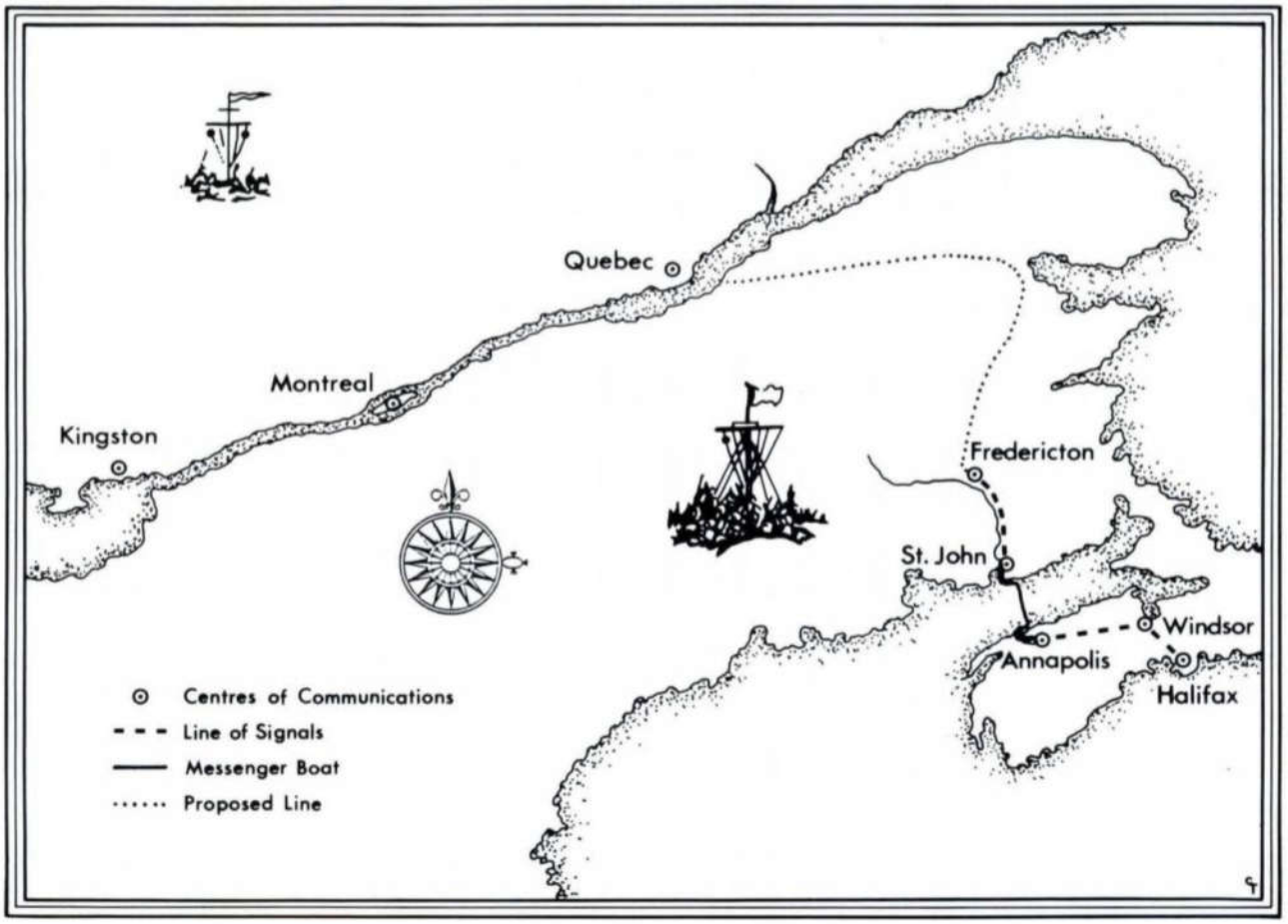
what faster than a man on horseback could travel the rough roads of the day. Unfortunately, despite all this effort at a rapid dispersal of such information the message was inaccurate — not the first time that the medium has shown a greater concern for the rapid dissemination of a message than for its accuracy.

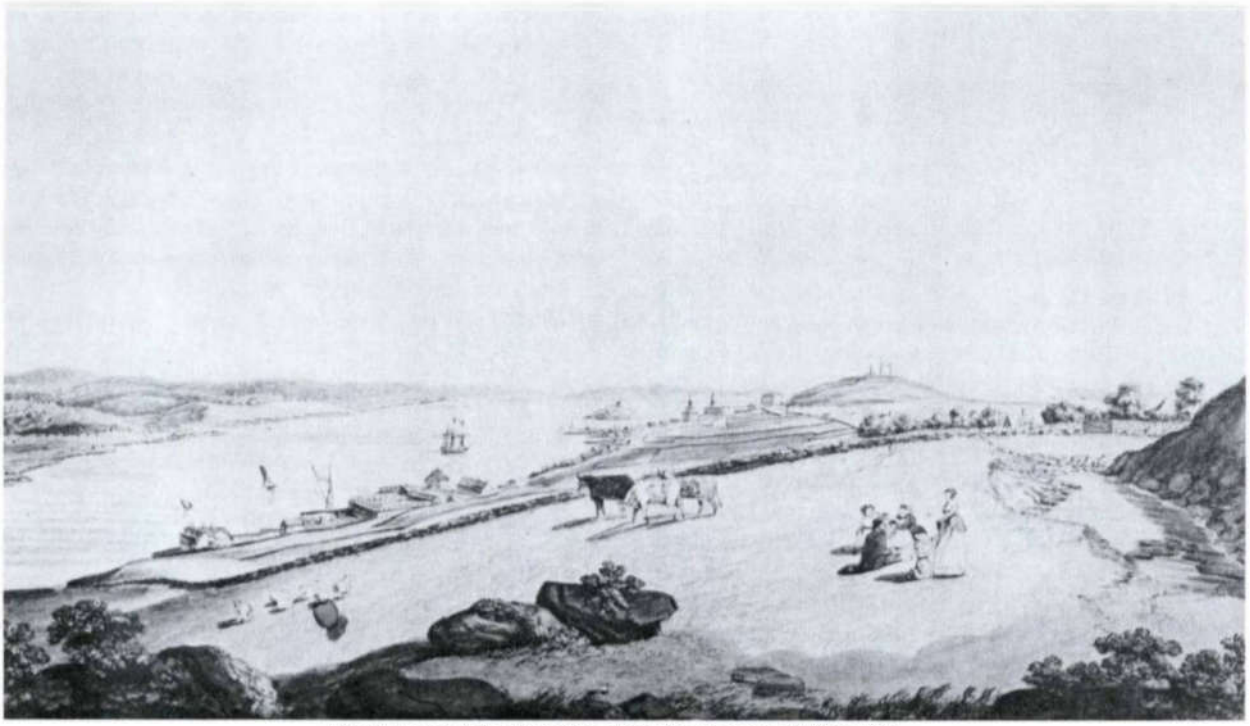
As this was a military communication system, it was not used by the civilian population at all. News of war and peace and princely arrivals and departures was only a fraction of the volume of messages. After all, Edward had established the system in order to keep his hand firmly on his command and thus he sent messages on all matters, even the most picayune. Captain Lyman in February of 1800 wrote from his office in Halifax commenting to Edward Winslow in Fredericton on the Prince's attention to detail:

> The Duke returned on Saturday, what he has been about so much longer than he had proposed I have not heard, but I am told they have established telegraphs all the way to Annapolis, so that there was a continual communication kept up of ordering and counter orders while he was away even to the approval of courts martial and ordering the men to be flogged. I was at Barracks on Saturday to pay a visit to Col. Burrows when on looking out the window I saw preparations making that I did not understand, on asking what it meant the Col. told me it was a punishment going on. Expressing my surprize at it during the Duke's absence, I was told the men were to be flogged by Telegraph. So though an hundred miles off, the Duke was acquainted with what was going on, and giving orders the same as usual.

The Duke also used the telegraph for his travel arrangements. In July of 1800, a month before he returned to England, Edward directed the Commission in Halifax to charter a vessel in Windsor in order that Major H.W. Hailes could return to Saint John. Arrangements were made to the effect that when a ship was available in Windsor, a telegraph message would be sent to Hailes in Halifax to proceed.

Prince Edward's communication system worked admirably and he considered an extension well beyond the two Atlantic provinces. Edward had planned a route





The view toward the Citadel from Fort Needham near Halifax, 1801.

from Saint John to Fredericton. He now wished to extend this northward around the Bay of Chaleur and up the St. Lawrence in order to connect with the telegraph system in Quebec. This route was taken to avoid the possibility of it being cut by a surprise attack by the Americans. It is conceivable that if an efficient telegraph system had been erected, a message to Quebec from Halifax would take twenty-four hours to arrive in ideal conditions. This would have represented no mean accomplishment for 1800. However, the operative phrase is "ideal conditions". Such rarely if ever existed. In fact even "imperfect conditions" were difficult to maintain.

If not for the fact that the British Empire and therefore Halifax was at war, Edward's communication system would undoubtedly not have been built. By all accounts it was expensive in material and men and impractical at a number of stations due to the weather. The stations were built on high ground with the surrounding area cleared of any undergrowth that might obscure the view of the flag staff. The distance between stations varied, the average being seven to eight miles. Over water they might be more than 15 miles. The Saint John communication system had two signal stations, Point Lepreau and Wolf, seventeen miles apart across Maces Bay in southern New Brunswick. There were nine stations up the Saint John River to Fredericton, an average of about nine miles between stations. The Halifax telegraph crossed both land and water and the distance varied greatly: Citadel to York Redoubt four miles; York Redoubt to Camperdown seven miles, and Camperdown to Sambro four miles. It was thus that a chain of structures topped by a masted flag staff wound its way from Halifax to Fredericton and would have stretched well beyond that point if Edward had had his way.

In 1799, Edward visualized an unbroken and uninterrupted communication network between Nova Scotia and Canada for this was "so obviously essential to the safety and prosperity of this Province" given the danger posed by the young republic to the south. However, a simple exercise in addition and subtraction indicates the disadvantages of Edward's telegraph. His vision was too expensive. With signal stations 6-8 miles apart and requiring six men to man them, the long line of small wooden stations could hardly be justified to construct and to operate over the long term. Thus the stations were never built past Fredericton. In addition to the expense, there were strategic considerations. Governor Carleton in Fredericton expressed them best:

> A hundred men (at least) would be required to attend such a chain of telegraphs as was contemplated, and as the General had no other troops under his command but the New Brunswick Regiment, which then consisted of about 290 effective men, he could not have furnished the complement for the Telegraphs without abandoning some of the most important posts in the province, and changing the whole distribution of the troops.

Aside from the operational expenses, there was also the clearing away and maintaining of a clear view between stations, the possibility of a high rate of desertion among the signal men to the United States, and the necessity of compensation to the land-holders who might be in the path of the line — a problem which occurred quite frequently in the Canadas. There were also the difficulties with fog in the Bay of Fundy which could close down any of the coastal signal systems. In this matter, Carleton's comments were noteworthy. He writes in a letter dated 10 July 1801 to Edward as follows:

> The uncommon and impenetrable fogs which have prevailed here during the whole of this season and which continue without abatement will prevent my attempting to erect the Telegraph on the Wolves [islands south of Saint John] agreeable to the recommendation of Your Royal Highness . . . .

After Edward left British North America in 1800, the system's effectiveness was limited to Halifax, Nova Scotia and Saint John, New Brunswick. Peace between Britain and France in 1802 led to considerable cuts in the military budget in Halifax. A small guard was maintained at some stations and the expensive toy of visual telegraph fell into disuse and disrepair. One writer noted that after 1802 ". . . a cloud of mystery as impenetrable as the Fundy fog obscured Edward's system." Beyond Bedford Basin and into the hinterland towards Windsor it was not used. The Halifax harbour military communication from the Citadel to Sambro was maintained by the army and the Saint John system of signals also seems to have been kept up. Beyond these centres, however, were deserted "signal hills".

Despite the renewal of hostilities in Europe in 1803, there was little interest in the telegraph system until the War of 1812. With the threat of an attack on the province by American privateers, the Legislative Assembly in Nova Scotia was moved to vote a total of £8,000 for blockhouses, temporary work, arming boats and lastly the telegraph operation. The defences of Halifax and Saint John were once more co-ordinated by a telegraph system and the province steeled itself for an American land and sea attack which never came. Although at times troubled by privateers the Atlantic provinces were never in any real danger of assault. The closest Halifax came to combat was the sea struggle between the U.S.S. *Chesapeake* and the H.M.S. *Shannon*. Aside from the surge of enthusiasm and patriotism it gave Haligonians when the *Shannon* won, it also allowed the capture of the private signal code of Commander James Lawrence ". . . the *Chesapeake* having been boarded too suddenly to admit of the document being destroyed." A copy of the code and private signals was then sent to the frigate *Nymph*

LIGHTHOUSE & SIGNAL STATION
Toronto Island Lighthouse
Built 1808. Upper part added 1832. Height 82 feet. From Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto.
Telegraph Signal on Lake Ontario
C.W. JEFFERYS
This C.W. Jefferys drawing shows an early nineteenth-century signal mast with flags on Lake Ontario near present-day Toronto.

which was cruising off Cape Breton looking for stray Yankee privateers. Even at that early date, it was considered a great achievement to break the enemy's signal code.

By 1815, the empire was at peace with both the French and the Americans. The most frequently used signal system was that which reported shippage to the military and the town merchants. The visual telegraph system was still maintained for the private use of the military.

After 1815, the need for rapid communication was no longer necessary. The system had been perceived by many as serving only military purposes and the danger of military invasion had passed.

Surprisingly the burgeoning commercial interests of Halifax did not utilize this ready-made network. With the influx of immigrants into the province a market for consumer goods was beginning to emerge throughout the hinterland. The visual communication system was for its time the most rapid means to send and receive information. However, Edward's network did have a number of very basic drawbacks. To the merchants it was too expensive in both men and material

to operate profitably. The perpetual fog that drifted along the North Atlantic coast was an inhibiting factor for communication and almost all of the new thriving settlements in the province were along the coast. The coastal vessels could carry letters or messages with their freight and perhaps even if the fog was thick still deliver such communications to their destination. The merchant attitude of entrepreneurship must also be questioned. Halifax was a garrison town and the merchants of Halifax provisioned a guaranteed market — the British military forces stationed there. Therefore, they had little cause to seek a market beyond the Halifax peninsula. Rapid communication with other settlements in the province and in other provinces on economic or political matters was of no great consequence.

Almost a half-century would pass before Prince Edward's visual telegraph would be replaced by the electric telegraph device which would be as awesome to the mid-nineteenth century public of Europe and North America as Edward's toy was to the community of eighteenth-century Halifax — a community which had witnessed the first rapid-communication land telegraph in North America. ♦

This article is based on a research manuscript on communication prepared for Parks Canada, Environment Canada. The author would like to thank the Historical Research Section and the Interpretation Section, Halifax Defence Complex, for their assistance and support.

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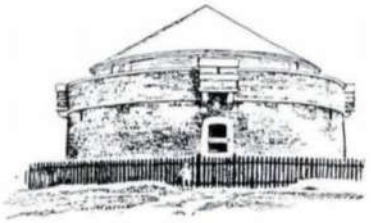


Martello Tower at Point Pleasant, Halifax.

Signals Made in Halifax, 1799.

The following signals are made in the Citadel when vessels are coming into Halifax Harbour:

One Ball — For one square rigged vessel.

One Ball half hoisted — For two square rigged vessel.

Two Balls close — For three square rigged vessel.

Two Balls separated — For four square rigged vessel.

A Pendant of any colour — For five square rigged vessel.

A Pendant under one Ball — For six square rigged vessel.

A Pendant over a Ball half hoisted — For seven square rigged vessel.

A Pendant under two Balls close — For eight square rigged vessel.

A Pendant between two Balls separated — For nine square rigged vessel.

A Flag of any colour — For ten or more.

The above are hoisted at the East or West Yard Arm, according to the Quarter the Vessel first appears in, and as soon as the Vessel can be described one or more of the following Colours are hoisted at the Mast head.

A Union — For a Flag Ship with or without a Squadron.

A Union with a Red Pendant over it — For a two decker.

A Union with a Blue Pendant over it — For a Frigate.

A Union with a White Pendant over it — For a small armed vessel.

A Red Flag pierced White — For a Packet.

A Blue Pendant — For a merchant ship.

A Red Pendant — For a merchant Brig.

A White Pendant — For a Topsail Sloop or Schooner.

A Red Flag — For a Neutral Man of War.

A Red Flag with Blue Pendant under it — For a Neutral Merchant Ship.

A Red Flag with Red Pendant under it — For Neutral Sloop or Schooner.

Enemy's Signals

A French Jack — For an Enemy's Fleet.

A Blue Pendant under a French Pendant — For an Enemy's Ship.

A Red Pendant under a French Pendant — For an Enemy's Brig.

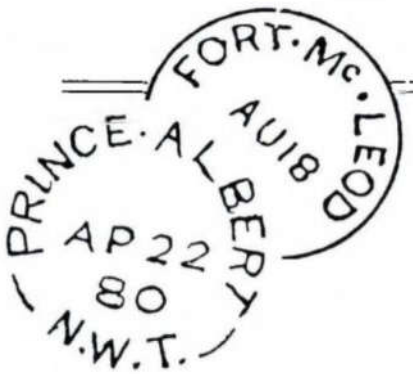
A White Pendant under a French Pendant — For an Enemy's sloop or Schooner.

N.B. No Signals can be made with those for describing Enemy's Vessels except when they are in our possession, in which case, a Union Jack will be hoisted over the Signal.

Signal of Distress

In cases when immediate assistance is necessary, a Ball at the mast head, in addition to the descriptive colours of the Vessel in Distress, and Guns occasionally until the Signal is attended to.

By Command.



Letters to a Friend

In the Midst of Life

Introduced by Ruth M. Buck

There are four of these letters, written from Prince Albert and Fort Macleod over a hundred years ago, to Lilian Sharpe, who had been Jessie's special friend and confidant in England during the winter of 1883-84, when Jessie was twenty-one. It seems unlikely that the two ever met again, but Lilian saved the letters, which are now in the possession of her great-nephew, Dr. Alexander Marrack of Thunder Bay, Ontario. Through the courtesy of Helen E. Wheaton of Prince Albert, and the late J. Fortescue McKay, permission has been granted for their publication.

Jessie was the eldest daughter of the Right Reverend John McLean, who was Anglican Bishop of Saskatchewan Diocese from 1874 to 1886. In 1866, when Jessie was four years old, the family had come from Huron Diocese in Canada West, to the Red River Settlement, where McLean was Warden of St. John's College, and Archdeacon of Assiniboia (Manitoba).

No twenty years in the history of the North-West were more eventful than those years, and Jessie's recollections would be clear. Yet when she returned to Prince Albert in the critical months of 1884, the letters that she wrote to England were concerned with events that were of more personal interest to her friend and herself. She does refer, in her Christmas letter of 1885, to an earlier account that she had written, and which apparently was not saved. In it she told of experiences during the weeks when life at Prince Albert centred within its stockade of cordwood. She had no wish to dwell on that again. "Two Riel Rebellions suffice for me", was her forthright comment.

Instead, she wrote of events in the life at Bishop's Court and her own activities. That is where the appeal lies, that is why her friend treasured these letters, and why they survived. In some aspects they can be compared to Jane Austen's writings, and not only because in their earlier time those novels were just as unconcerned with the much greater disturbance of the Napoleonic struggles. It is true, of course, that Jessie lacked Jane Austen's discerning ability, yet the life of this bishop's daughter in a pioneer settlement on the North Saskatchewan continued in the same tradition, the same gentle manners that had framed the lives of such girls in Jane Austen's world.

Jessie's father was a merchant's son from Portsoy who graduated from King's College, Aberdeen, with honours in classics and science; and who gained some knowledge of French, German, and Spanish too, when he was in charge of foreign correspondence in his uncle's merchandising firm. That was in London, England. There he joined the Anglican Church, and was advised to seek ordination in Canada from Bishop Cronyn, who appointed him curate of the cathedral in London, Canada West, and chaplain to the garrison.

Three years later, in 1861, he married Kathleen Wilhelmina Flood, whose father was an Irish clergyman. Her mother, Frances Mary Blake, had also come from Ireland, and was the daughter of a clergyman and sister to another. It would be in the fields of law and politics, however, that more noted members of that Hume-Blake connection won their place in Canadian history. This was undoubtedly helpful when John McLean became Bishop of Saskatchewan, and could find in Toronto and Ottawa the support of such advisors as his wife's cousins, in all legal and financial matters affecting his diocese.

Through all their lives, John McLean's three older daughters would be directly associated with the Church, all three marrying clergymen, just as their mother, their grandmother, and their great-grandmother had, each in her time. It was that very matter of time that troubled Jessie most, for it passed much too slowly in Prince Albert, and this was at the heart of her need for a confidant when she wrote her letters. At eighteen, she had fallen in love with a theological student a few months younger than herself. It could be years before her father would agree to their marriage, and certainly not before Ronald Hilton reached that "Canonical age of 23" which was required for ordination. Meanwhile, the young man continued his studies in theology, served as catechist in missions within riding distance of Prince Albert, and was an assistant tutor in the boys' school at Emmanuel College.

Ronald was a clergyman's son from Peterborough in Ontario, and not quite seventeen when he registered

Bishop John McLean.

as a student at Emmanuel. That was in the winter of 1879-80, when the work of training catechists and teachers for missions in the Diocese was begun. Three log houses, near St. Mary's Church and its school, accommodated students and staff until summer came again and the large frame building was completed. It provided classroom and library space, and a residence for Bishop McLean as Warden. His family could come from Winnipeg at last.

It was six years since John McLean had made his first long journey back to England to secure the required endowment funds for the new diocese, and then at Canterbury in the spring to be consecrated Bishop of Saskatchewan. They had been years of almost constant travel — to England again; to Winnipeg and Eastern Canada summer after summer to gain support for his plans, and money to advance them; and in winter, when the ice was deep on rivers and lakes, to the scattered missions of his diocese, by dog-train from Prince Albert.

All that would have continued, but after 1879, the diocesan work and his home life could centre in the young settlement of Prince Albert, straggling for five miles along the North Saskatchewan River. Within the borders of the diocese, means of travel were practically unchanged, but in the world beyond, steamships and railways had dramatic effect. Steamboats had made their appearance on the Red River in 1859, but such travel was only seasonal, and dependent as well on water levels. It would be another twenty years before railway travel was possible between Winnipeg and St. Paul.

It was by that Minnesota route that the McLeans came to the Red River Settlement in October 1866, and their journey from Upper Canada took three weeks. St. Cloud was then the terminus of the St. Paul and Pacific Railway, and the last four hundred miles to the settlement was by a rough trail through wooded country east of the Red River Valley. This was safer, for to the west the devastated land was haunted still by the terror of the Sioux uprising, directed chiefly against the United States Army and American settlers. Trade between St. Paul and the Red River Settlement continued, but all traffic moved with caution, and in brigades or trains of carts that displayed the Hudson's Bay Company ensign or the British flag.

That warfare, and years of drought had halted any summer travel by steamboat, but late in the season there were no flies or mosquitoes, and without that torment, and given good weather, travelling could be pleasant, and much easier for small children. On that journey to Red River, there were three little girls in the McLean family, Jessie, Fannie, and Winnie — or to give the full names reserved for proper ceremony, Kathleen Jessie, Frances Mary Blake, and Wilhelmina Anne Brough, named in that order for the grandmother in Scotland, and then for the grandmother in Upper Canada, and her sister, who had made their own long and difficult journey from Ireland years before.

In that same tradition, the first boy in the family would have been named Charles for his paternal grandfather. In the summer of 1867, when he was born in St. John's Parish at Red River, his sister Jessie was five years old; and in the letters that she wrote as a young woman, he is the only brother to whom she refers by name, using still the affectionate but misleading diminutive, "Bertie". His full resounding name was actually Robert Machray McLean, for the Bishop of Rupert's Land, whose appeal to his friend of student days at Aberdeen had brought John McLean to the Red River Settlement. Together they were to establish a sound level of scholarship at St. John's College, in 1866 no more than a cluster of makeshift buildings, but by 1877 affiliated with other colleges at Red River in the degree-granting University of Manitoba.

This was McLean's vision too, for his Diocese — first a training school for mission workers, but finally his own theological college, in a university of Saskatchewan. To this purpose, he lent all his forceful eloquence on strenuous speaking tours that gained support for the plan even before the college site could be determined. Battleford was considered first, for it was on the route surveyed for the railway, and in 1876 became the capital of the North-West Territories.

In the meantime, however, a change in the Hudson's Bay Company's transportation policy introduced steamboats on Lake Winnipeg and the Saskatchewan River. Prince Albert was most favourably situated for trade into the North. More than that, the Company's

Anglican diocese in the North-West and Manitoba in the 1880s, from Church Missionary Society Records, 1885.

land grant in that area was extensive, and settlement was vigorously promoted. Population increased rapidly. Prince Albert could become "the Chicago of the North", for the railway was bound to come to "the fertile belt".

That was the general expectation all through the Territories, when the McLeans made their journey from Winnipeg to Prince Albert. Through the summers of successive years, high water levels permitted navigation of the Assiniboine River, and there was regular steamboat service between Winnipeg and Fort Ellice. This could reduce by 240 miles the total distance along familiar stretches of the old trail to Fort Carlton; and there were travellers, or settlers with all their effects, who did take passage that far. For those continuing to Prince Albert, still another 350 miles of trail stretched to the north-west.

The rate of travel varied. The contract for mail-carrying might set forty miles per day, but that required stopping-houses, and bridges and ferries. There were still only a few of these, and chiefly in the eastern section of the route. Bridges that had been built were swept out by the same high waters that favoured steamboat navigation; streams that were usually forded became too deep to be crossed in that way at any time during the season.

With every allowance made for bad roads and exceptional weather, however, the Saskatchewan *Herald* at Battleford still found it unreasonable that, in the spring of 1880, the mails should settle down to 12 or 15 miles a day, which meant more than seven weeks from Winnipeg. Yet this was not unusual, even later in the season, for travellers accompanied by women and children; and could very well have been the rate of progress when the McLeans made their second journey westward.

There were eight children in the family then, with three more boys and a little girl, Florence Maude

Dagmar, for whose lessons Jessie would be responsible. The youngest boy was only a toddler, but his older brothers had begun attendance at St. John's College School, and their father was to introduce a similar plan at Emmanuel, based on the English public school system. This offered the first high-school course in the territories, and drew boys from the town that was developing around the central site of the original Presbyterian mission, three or four miles down the river. At Emmanuel, the advantage in learning undoubtedly lay with the Bishop's sons, and at prize-givings later their names appeared regularly in the Prince Albert *Times:* Robert Machray McLean, John Inglis McLean, Hume Blake McLean — and finally, Denham Norreys McLean.

For the three older girls, school days had ended in Winnipeg, where the Diocese had assumed responsibility for the Ladies' College that succeeded Miss Davis' noted school for girls, which had closed after her death

in 1873. Years later at Prince Albert, under a third Bishop of Saskatchewan who happened to have five daughters of school age, St. Alban's Ladies' College would have its beginning. An advertisement in the *Times* of February 1907 mentioned "special attention given to Music, Painting, Drawing, and Art Needlework". Education in a school for girls had changed little, though some of St. Alban's first graduates were to continue through university, and with distinction.

In the 1870s those doors were still firmly barred to women students; and in all probability Bishop McLean would have agreed that higher education for them could serve no real purpose. The would only marry; and surely girls who had been educated in "a ladies' college" would never be denied leisure and opportunity for the satisfaction that "Music, Painting, Drawing, and Art Needlework" could bring to their lives.

Indeed, almost from the beginning, Prince Albert did offer surprising opportunities for the cultivation and enjoyment of the arts. That its predominantly male society offered as well every encouragement for girls to marry was typical of the West at that time. The arrival of the Bishop's daughters would have created a stir through the whole settlement, though it was not quite as strangers that they came to the Saskatchewan.

That great river and the Carlton Trail were still the main arteries of trade and communication. Together they had created in the first settlements on the Saskatchewan, a distinctive way of life, a sense almost of kinship in shared experiences, in friendships, and in familiar names. Its first roots were in the Red River Settlement, its continuing nurture in mutual growth with Winnipeg; and St. John's College provided a link in that bonding.

In the Diocese of Saskatchewan, Ronald Hilton may have been a newcomer, but James Flett and George McKay belonged to families known through all the West. Both had been boys in the College School, and members practically of the McLean family in St. Cross House when it was the Warden's Residence. At Prince Albert, Fannie was to marry James Flett; and Winnie, six years later, became the wife of George McKay.

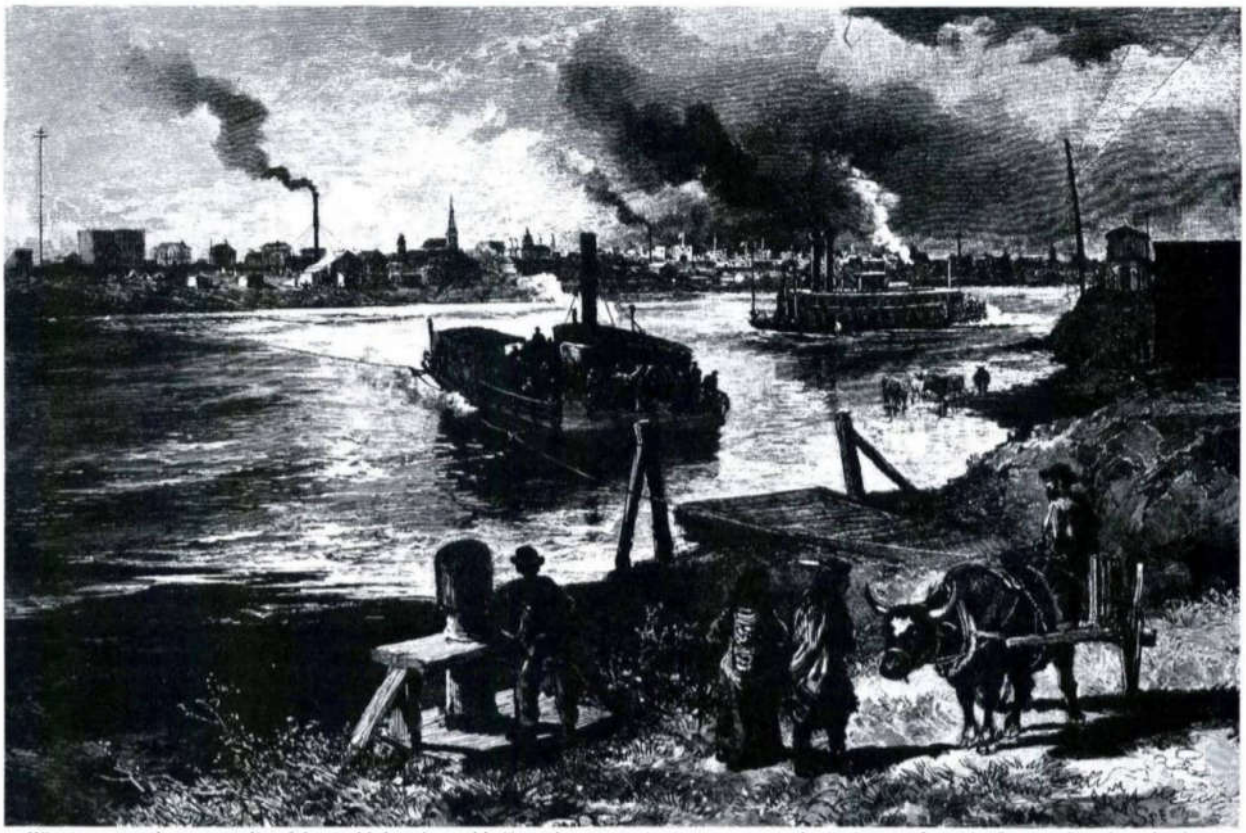
Many of the students at St. John's College were sons of Hudson's Bay Company officers from the interior, their families inter-related often through generations, and wide-spread through the whole territory of the fur trade. The McKays were a particular instance. Eight brothers, in the fourth generation of service with the Company, came in succession, sometimes two or three at a time, and year after year, to St. John's College, from Fort Ellice or Fort Pelly, and finally from Fort Pitt, where their father, Factor William McKay, was in charge from 1872 until his death in 1883.

There were only two sisters in the family. They attended Miss Davis' School in St. Andrew's Parish at Red River, and then, in the tradition of that training, married officers of the Company. Harriet, the eldest of the family, married Chief Trader William E. Traill; and Kate, Chief Factor Laurence Clarke of Fort Carlton, whose "boundless hospitality" required the large house that he built later at Prince Albert.

In 1874, the first of the brothers, Thomas McKay, had married and was establishing his home in that settlement; the second, named for their father, was in the service of the Company at Fort Carlton; and George, twenty years old and next in succession, was recruited as interpreter and general handyman by John Hines, newly arrived that summer from England to open a mission among the Indians of the Fort Carlton area.

Hines was a dedicated lay-missionary, whose experience in agriculture was to be helpful when Chief Ahtahkakoop's band settled on their reservation at Sandy Lake. It would seem doubtful, however, that the Englishman appreciated the quality of his recruit for the work, "a native of the country", whom he had "picked up" at Fort Ellice, and whom Hines considered as under obligation "to serve for three years at a uniform salary, and then, if reports were favorable, be at liberty to return to college and study for the ministry."

The Bishop was not aware of this arrangement until he came to the Diocese for the first time in February



Winnipeg was the metropolis of Jessie McLean's world. Here the young city is seen across the Red River from the St. Boniface ferry landing, from "Picturesque Canada", 1882.

of 1875, and met George McKay at Prince Albert. He had been one of McLean's most promising students at St. John's. No further report was necessary, nor three years service in the field. Hines had to find another assistant, adequately suited to his needs; and years later, in his book *Red Indians of the Plains*, recounted the loss, still with a sense of grievance.

George McKay returned to St. John's to begin the study of theology, continuing to Cambridge for two years on a scholarship that Bishop Machray was able to secure as a Fellow of Sidney Sussex College. In 1878, both bishops were in England to attend the second Lambeth Conference, and undertook speaking tours to raise funds for their work, Machray particularly for St. John's, and McLean for his own diocesan training school. George McKay was twenty-four that summer, and in London, Bishop McLean ordained him deacon and then priest, that he might leave England early in July to proceed directly to Fort Macleod. There he was to minister to the Mounted Police and settlers, and open a mission among the Indians of that area, work for which he was eminently suited.

The Plains Indians of the Blackfoot Confederacy had signed Treaty No. 7, and were choosing their reserves, in reluctant admission that reliance on the buffalo hunt could mean only starvation. Those once uncounted herds, and the wild excitement of the chase were part of George McKay's memory too, early experience that the years at Cambridge could not possibly efface, any more than Hebrew or Greek could replace the liquid fluency of languages that he had known from boyhood.

His family name, his acquaintance with Plains Indians and their way of life, his fluency in four of their languages — all this was helpful in his work, undoubtedly. In addition, there was his own particular skill, one that Indians, Mounted Police, and ranchers alike valued highly. From a family of noted horsemen, this McKay ranked as superb.

It was four years since the North West Mounted Police had made their historic march of more than eight hundred miles, west across the plains from Fort Dufferin to Fort Macleod, and had then established a line of communication south across the international border, two hundred and forty-five miles to Fort Benton at the headwaters of the Missouri River. In the summer of 1878, McKay travelled from the east by American railway as far as Bismarck in North Dakota, and then by paddle-wheel steamboat up the Missouri, another two weeks' journey, to Fort Benton.

North West Mounted Police, from "Picturesque Canada", 1882.

From there, supplies were freighted north by bull-train, and mails carried across the international border to the North West Mounted Police station where Colonel Macleod had his headquarters. That difficult trail was the most direct means of communication that Fort Macleod had with the outside world until the spring of 1883, when the Police contract with Fort Benton expired. The Canadian Pacific Railway then stretched well beyond Swift Current, and Maple Creek served as railway terminal for the Police and ranchers in the southwest until Medicine Hat and finally Calgary became the main distributing centre for all that area.

To the settlements on the Saskatchewan, the choice of the southern route for the railway, and the swift progress of its construction across the uninhabited plains would have all the adverse effects of delayed shock. They had been convinced that the railway would certainly follow the general course of Fleming's survey. It was late in January of 1882 that The *Bulletin* reported from Edmonton that the Yellowhead Pass was to be abandoned, but added with confidence still, "There is to be a branch line from the main line near Qu'Appelle to Edmonton, simultaneously with the main line to Calgarry" [*sic*].

At Prince Albert, the boom that began in February only gathered momentum through the year, and the total population reached almost 5,000. It was in such confident spirit that the first Synod of Saskatchewan Diocese met at the end of August to hear the Bishop's report on the progress of the work, and his ambitious plans for Emmanuel College. There were still no more than ten ordained clergymen at widely scattered points through the whole extent of the huge Diocese, and two of them in the far south-west had to come more than seven hundred miles to attend.

George McKay rode east from Fort Macleod about two hundred miles to the railway terminal, and then an even greater distance from the railroad station at Qu'Appelle, but there at least one of his brothers waited with fast horses, to bring him at a pace that no buck-board stage-coach could equal, along that dusty trail from Troy to Prince Albert. The McKays were assembling in lively force to be present at Emmanuel College when George would be admitted bachelor of divinity by Bishop McLean, acting as deputy for Bishop Machray, chancellor of St. John's College, University of Manitoba.

McLean had acted in that same capacity in January, when the Reverend James Clouston Flett, another of his students from St. John's College days, was admitted bachelor of divinity. Of the "large and influential gathering" that winter night at Emmanuel, the majority had been present in St. Mary's Church only a week earlier for the marriage of James Flett and Frances Mary Blake, the Bishop's daughter.

In the records of the Hudson's Bay Company, the name Flett occurs even more frequently than McKay, but seldom with the individual distinction achieved by a number of the McKay family, whose origin in the Highlands of Scotland was certainly no disadvantage in the fur trade, nor generally, for that matter, in the West. The Fletts, and the Cloustons too, came originally from the Orkneys, where the Hudson's Bay Company by the late eighteenth century recruited perhaps three-quarters of its personnel in the Bay — "tough Orcadians", the historian describes them, who brought from their rugged homeland its austere, dogged qualities, and the ancient skill which they adapted to the rivers and lakes of the North-West, in the York boats they built and manned.

When Chief Trader William Flett came from Fort Edmonton in 1867 to take charge at Lower Fort Garry, his two older sons had their first opportunity for education under highly qualified instructors, and in the fellowship of a boarding-school. St. John's was modelled on the lines of such an English public school as Westminster, and it was Bishop Machray's expectation that

some seniors in the school would continue as theological students in the college. The older of the Flett brothers, William Robert, was sixteen when he enrolled, and he did follow such a course, combining theological studies with mission work, and in 1878 succeeding George McKay at Cambridge on another of the scholarships to Sidney Sussex College.

James Clouston Flett was only twelve when he came to St. John's, and after matriculation he continued for a few years at the school as an assistant-master. He was twenty-four when the work of Emmanuel College began, and Bishop McLean appointed him to that staff as a tutor, on the understanding that he would continue his own studies in theology under McLean's instruction. He was ordained deacon in 1880, and priest in 1881, successfully completing the required course from St. John's late that same year for the degree of bachelor of divinity.

When Synod met those months later, there were many present who recalled the earlier meeting at Emmanuel, and the wedding that had preceded it by only a week. Fannie was herself a reminder, her face reflecting the happiness and pride that the January ceremonies had given, together with her own added sense of importance in her new status as a married woman at eighteen.

Jessie, on her part, might have accepted that with all the unruffled poise of her mother's training, had it not been that at any such gathering some well-intentioned person was certain to turn from complimenting Fannie, to remark to Jessie, "Shouldn't let your sister get ahead of you like that!" And now, George McKay had returned after long absence, to discover that Winnie, who had been still a child when he left Winnipeg to go to Cambridge, had become an attractive girl, with wit and sparkle to match his own.

Mrs. McLean was one of the first to notice his interest, and Winnie's glowing response, but Jessie had been quick to see it too. Their mother was concerned — not so much for Winnie, who at sixteen was scarcely younger than she herself had been when she fell in love with John McLean — but for Jessie, barely reconciled to the marriage of one younger sister. Their father at first could see no reason for concern. If Winnie had any such notions, her mother should talk to her. She was a sensible girl, with duties enough at home to keep her occupied; and George McKay would be at Fort Macleod, where his new appointment as canon would keep him busy in that far corner of the Diocese.

Still, in her father's heart, Jessie had her own place as the first of his daughters; and, as the weeks passed, he realized that her wistful face and melancholy songs were more than just the fashionable pose of the period. It was evident that the girl needed a change, and railway travel made that possible now. Mrs. McLean could accompany him to Ontario and England, with Jessie for her companion while he was occupied with meetings or speaking engagements. The girl might even meet someone else, and forget Ronald Hilton, quietly plodding on towards ordination, still four years in the future.

The schedule for that winter, however, was particularly heavy. There would have to be discussions first in Toronto and Ottawa to promote the bill for incorporation of a university of Saskatchewan at Prince Albert. Upon the success of all that would depend the campaign in Ontario and in England to raise the necessary endowment fund for Emmanuel as an affiliated college. The Bishop knew that he had strong support, and was reasonably confident, but it would take more than the one winter. There would certainly have to be a follow-up tour the next winter. That was when Mrs. McLean could accompany him. She might even speak herself, to women's groups in the congregations that invited him to tell about the work of the Church in his remote Diocese.

That winter of 1882, Mrs. McLean would have been most reluctant, in any case, to leave home. Dennie was only five, too young to attend school classes at Emmanuel with his brothers. Winnie would have had to take responsibility for his lessons, and for Maude's too, and without much assurance of help from Fannie, who might very well need help herself. England was simply too far away from then all, certainly for that winter.

So the Bishop went alone again, and once again was successful in his campaign. It was June when he returned to Prince Albert and word followed him there that the bill to incorporate the university had passed the House. He could plan a follow-up campaign to secure full financial support. At home, it seemed that everything was well too, and he had been back in time to welcome their first grandchild, Fannie's little daughter. Mrs. McLean was willing now to leave the family, testing such absence first, however, on a two-months' journey that summer, accompanying the Bishop to Battleford, and west to Edmonton, then south to Fort Macleod before they travelled east by railway to Winnipeg.

The Provincial Synod of Rupert's Land was meeting there, and one important topic for discussion was to be the establishment of a new diocese in what was now officially the district of Assiniboia. The diocese would stretch from the enlarged boundary of Manitoba, along

the line of the railway as far as Medicine Hat, in the district of Alberta. Bishop McLean's large plans for the Diocese of Saskatchewan were adversely affected and his resistance threatened the friendship of many years between himself and Machray. Before Synod met, however, the rift was healed, McLean accepting the decision with good grace. Some of the credit for that must surely be given to the healing effects of that long round-about journey with Mrs. McLean to Winnipeg, through weeks of glorious autumn weather that ripened a bountiful harvest.

When they returned to Prince Albert, they had travelled in all about 2,500 miles, and 1,300 of those in an open wagon, camping often at night by the trail. Steamboat travel was practically impossible, even on the first stages of the journey. That summer, unlike the previous ones, water levels were so low that just to make the journey from Prince Albert to Battleford took the steamer *Northcote* six tedious days. In the rush of freighting before the season closed, there had to be a return to the older method of transportation. Brigades of carts passed through Battleford daily.

"After counting into hundreds", P.G. Laurie commented in his newspaper, "we ceased counting. Carts may be slower, but they are a great deal surer than steamboats on the Saskatchewan."

The Diocesan Synod met in October, and the Bishop referred in his address to travelling those thousand miles and more "in an open wagon". The "buckboard" was still the usual vehicle for travellers, but wagons with iron-rimmed wheels were making their appearance on western trails, and so was the lighter "democrat" or "democrat-wagon", with two spring seats, and space at the back for luggage. This would be their conveyance from Qu'Appelle back to Prince Albert the following summer, when Jessie wrote to her English friend: "We presented quite a formidable appearance travelling along. First, there came two large wagons containing our luggage, provisions, tents, cooking utensils etc. The man drove one & Bertie the other & we brought up the rear in our own carriage & horses which Papa drove."

When they left Prince Albert late in October of 1883 to start their journey to England, it may have been with an equally "formidable appearance". The weather, however, continued favourable, a brief cold spell succeeded by the marvel of Indian summer that lasted well into November; but when winter did come it set records unchallenged for another hundred years. Heavy snows fell on the plains; and in January, the Prince Albert *Times* noted, "Since the 9th. of December, the thermometer has never been above the cypher — 33° below (F) to 52° below zero." The Dominion Government had established a meteorological station at Emmanuel College, and Canon Flett was appointed observer.

Jessie was in England then, and these letters were all written after her return to the North-West. Bishop's Court is the address she has written on two, but the first, which is dated 29 September 1884, is simply from Prince Albert. It is headed with a crest and a motto: *Virtue Mine Honour.*

There is no division into paragraphs in the original letters, and the final one, from Fort Macleod, is cross-written as well "to get a large amount in very small space" and to save postage.

Crowded into the upper left-hand corner of the first letter is the request: "If you want to cheer my 'solemn heart' please write another letter like your last one very soon. Ever lovingly, Jessie". The letter begins:

My dear dear Lilian,

I expect you will be thinking that after all my promises to the contrary, I have forgotten about writing. But such is *not* the case, dear Lilian, for if I could have written to you as often as I should have liked to, I fear you would have been decidedly bored with the number of my epistles.

And now first and foremost you must hear how very welcome your letter was to me. Just fancy, Lilian, it arrived here the day before we did, & Winnie put it away so carefully that she forgot all about giving it to me, until two weeks after our arrival. One evening my heart felt very "solemn" with some of those worries & troubles I used to tell you of, & I was longing for England again, when Maude handed me this letter, saying that Winnie had forgotten it, in all the excitement of our arrival.

I opened it without even looking at the envelope, never dreaming of the treat in store for me. I turned to the signature & when I beheld the magic name of "Lilian" all my apathy vanished, & after devouring the contents thereof I was no longer "solemn hearted". So after all, Lilian, I forgave them for deferring my pleasure for a time.

And now for news of our trip. I sent you a paper from Winnipeg to let you know that so far we had

arrived in safety. We were ten days there — just time enough to become rested for our prairie journey, & Papa telegraphed to my eldest brother to arrange with someone to meet us at Qu'Appelle — *i.e.* the farthest point we can travel by rail.

Bertie did not reach Qu'Appelle as early as we expected & we were compelled to wait there for four days. That was the most trying part of the journey. The best hotel where we remained gave anything but the best accommodation. The rooms were more like wooden boxes than anything else & you could not do much more than step into bed from the door.

We met Bishop Anson [of the new Diocese of Assiniboia-Qu'Appelle]. He was consecrated shortly before we left England, & and it seemed so nice to see him again.

Mamma & I used to go for long walks to pass away the time. I will never forget our first encounter with a snake. We were having a stroll one very warm day, when I happened to cast my eyes down & see a large snake just gliding under Mamma's feet. I said very quietly "there is a snake", & you should have been there to have heard the shriek with which my information was greeted. After Mamma had recovered her first alarm she started after the reptile with her umbrella in the most vicious way, & did not cease her exertions until it was left a corpse.

I can just imagine, Lilian, you drawing your skirts about you & saying in the most pleading tone, "Oh Jessie, please stop". By this time I am quite hardened to seeing the reptiles, but in this case "distance (& the greater the better) lends enchantment to the view". Often in the tent after we had retired to rest, Mamma would say in sepulchral tones, "Jessie, do you feel the bed moving?" & I would be forced to reply that I was conscious of a gliding motion underneath. However we never had the courage to investigate whether our couch was really a bed of snakes.

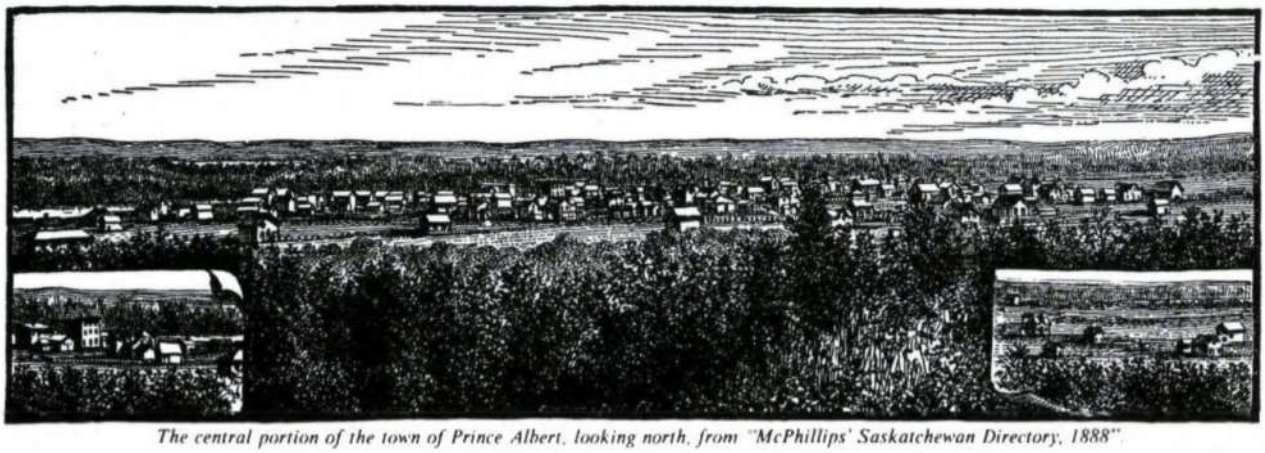
We had several amusing adventures on the way, one of which I must tell you. One night after we had been in Camp some time, & it was quite dark, Mamma & I went off for a stroll in the direction of some bushes near. We were busy talking & laughing, until Mamma suddenly laid a trembling hand on my arm, with the question, "What's that?" in an alarmed whisper. I gazed before me into the darkness & saw with a fainting heart what looked to me like a black bear with a white nose. Imagine our horror, which increased more & more as the bushes commenced to crackle as if the adversary meant to show fight. We brave creatures were not going to be undone, and after a consultation carried on in loud tones, decided to pelt the animal with the largest stones we could find. We however looked in vain for any missile wherewith to attack the enemy, & at a louder crackling of the bushes, our courage all oozed out & we shrieked for Bertie.

Bertie immediately rushed to our aid & all we could say was "a bear! a bear!" He looked rather amused after he investigated the matter & we laughed steadily for about an hour, when he came & said, "it is only Papa". His white collar was our bear's nose. I really thought Mamma would injure herself laughing & after we had retired we could hear Papa chuckling away to himself. When we started off, we thought he, with the man & Bertie, had retired into their tent. You can imagine how hard it was to get away unobserved sometimes. The night we camped on the Salt Plain, which is 40 miles across, we had to walk about five miles to get out of sight.

We presented quite a formidable appearance travelling along. First, there came two large wagons containing our luggage, provisions, tents, cooking utensils etc. The man drove one & Bertie the other and we brought up the rear in our own carriage & horses which Papa drove.

We were only home three weeks when Papa, Mamma, & Winnie this time, started off for Winnipeg again. Winnie will go on to London Ont., for the winter, but I expect Papa & Mamma back by the end of October. I have therefore been very, very busy with household duties & teaching Maude. Fannie had a little son two days after they left & I have been over with her a great deal lately. I have a niece and nephew now. I dread to think of Winter without Winnie but she was so pulled down when we returned that she had to be taken away.

I have the banner you gave me on a bracket beside my bed & "Under the Surface" opposite on my bookshelf. Your painting also decorates my wall & I only want your photo to make my room complete.



The central portion of the town of Prince Albert, looking north, from "McPhillips' Saskatchewan Directory, 1888".

You see, I have told everyone so much about you (expecially *some one*) that there have been several requests to see your photo & I have to reply that "I have not got one", but I hope it will not be for long.

How I should like a nice long chat with you tonight, Lilian. Do you remember the night we talked till four o'clock & I shocked you with some of my sayings? How little I dreamed then that there would be a reality some day in two or three things I said in jest then. But I must not become "solemn hearted" now & treat you to a dish of worry.

They have opened a Sunday School down in the town as it was so far for some of the children to come, so the S.S. here is not nearly so large as formerly. However we have the children who live near. I have taught them Mr. Graham's hymn, and they were so delighted with it & can sing it quite nicely. They enjoyed so much hearing about St. Paul's Sunday School & were especially amazed at the number of children there. I am regarded as quite a curiosity among them since my visit to England.

Now for the messages. Please remember me with love to Mrs. Graham & the children, Miss Londsdale, Miss Dickens [Charles Dickens' daughter Mary (1838-1896) who refused a suitor because her father disapproved, and later acted officially as his hostess. She was left an annuity of three hundred pounds, if she remained single. Her brother, Francis Dickens, joined the N.W.M.Police and was in command of a detachment at Fort Pitt in 1885.], Miss Sachs. I hope to be able to write to Miss Lonsdale soon. When Mamma returns I will have much more time for writing & I will then be able to tell you many things want of time has compelled me to omit.

Have you laughed much lately? I have not had a good laugh for ever so long. My face has grown quite stiff and solemn looking.

Good bye, dearest Lilian. Much love to your Aunts and your sweet little self.
Lovingly, Jessie.

* * *

The second letter to England, with the crest and motto at the head, has Bishop's Court as address and the date 2 December 1884:

My darling Lilian, I was so delighted to receive your last letter. I have put off writing so that this will reach you about Xmas time, that you may have my very best wishes for a happy Xmastide together with birthday congratulations. I do hope, dear, that you will all spend a very happy Xmas & New Year & that you may have *many, many, many* happy returns of your birthday.

You will be often in my thoughts during this coming Xmas time & I hope you will think of your old friend Jessie away off in the frozen regions of the North. I can hardly realize that last Year this time we were in England. It seems so long ago. Just like a pleasant dream that has vanished forever. Yours is one of the sweet dreamland faces passing to & fro that bring back to memory "days of long ago" etc., but in the words of the same song, I can add: "Hope on, dear Love. We shall meet again."

Mamma & I so often talk of the time when we will have you here. What fun we could have as long anyway as the thermometer was under [less than] 60° below zero [F]). The Sunday before last it was 50° below zero and we were nearly frozen in Church. I play the organ & there was not the slightest particle of feeling in my feet & hands. There was about an inch thick of frost on the organ Keys. The big box stoves were nearly red hot, so you can imagine how cold it was.

Fortunately this cold snap did not last long & now it is quite mild again. We are having such lovely moonlight nights just now. It is almost as light as

day & with the white snow & trees covered with sparkling frost it is a lovely sight. I have enjoyed several moonlight walks lately, the only fault being that such evenings tend to make one sentimental & you do not approve of sentimental people, do you, dearest Lilian? That nice missionary I expect will be awfully practical.

It was nice to hear of your visit to Yorkshire. I am glad you enjoyed it & that it did you good. Many, many thanks for the paper, Mr. Graham's sermon. Both Mamma & I enjoyed reading it very much. I think of you all every Sunday, especially going to & from Sunday School. Remember how good you used to be about seeing me home? Every Sunday I grew fonder of you, until I was quite in love. Ronald said the other day that you must be perfection from the way I talk of you. I think he is a little jealous of my great affection for England. I always tell him I would rather live there, just to tease him, you know. I do not add that it would altogether depend on his whereabouts.

Papa & Mamma arrived safely home again & oh how glad I was to see them. They attended the Synod in Winnipeg and then visited several places in the diocese. At Gleichen they saw Crowfoot the chief of the Blackfoot tribe & Papa made him a speech through an interpreter, to which he in turn replied. A little while ago, Crowfoot was taken to visit Winnipeg. He was tremendously surprised at everything he saw there. The electric light especially took his fancy. When he returned he said the white men were so clever they had caught a star & penned it so that it could not get away. He could not make out what made the ladies' waists so small, finally he came to the conclusion that they must eat something to make them small.

On the way home, Papa & Mamma had very stormy weather. On the Salt Plain they had a bad snowstorm & had to camp for a whole day. When they reached the South Branch of the Saskatchewan River the ice was tearing down. They were obliged to leave their waggons on the other side & go over in a little skiff. The weather was so stormy that I became sadly nervous about them.

Winnie went on down to London, Ont., & is enjoying herself there so much. We do not expect her home until next Autumn. She will find it very dull here, after all the fun she is having. We have just been out for a sleigh drive & it was delightful. We wished you were with us. The horses were so full of spirits that they positively flew along through the clear frosty air.

On Xmas day we are going to have a family gathering. Winnie will be the only one of our number absent. Mamma & I have a very busy time of it. I teach Maude entirely, besides having a quantity of sewing always on hand. We find the days all too short, sometimes. It becomes dark at four o'clock now so the evenings are pretty long.

I have learnt the song you gave me "Down the long avenue" & think it charming. Those words "When all our wearyful days are done" especially took my fancy. "Wearyful" is such an expressive word.

I am sending you some cards for Xmas & your birthday & hope they will reach you safely. Goodbye now, dear Lilian. May God ever bless & keep you & yours & grant that you may all spend a holy happy Xmastide. Mamma sends her best love to you & kind remembrances to your aunts. I am going to write soon to dear Miss Lonsdale. Remember me to all my old friends.

Ever lovingly yr. friend
Jessie

* * *

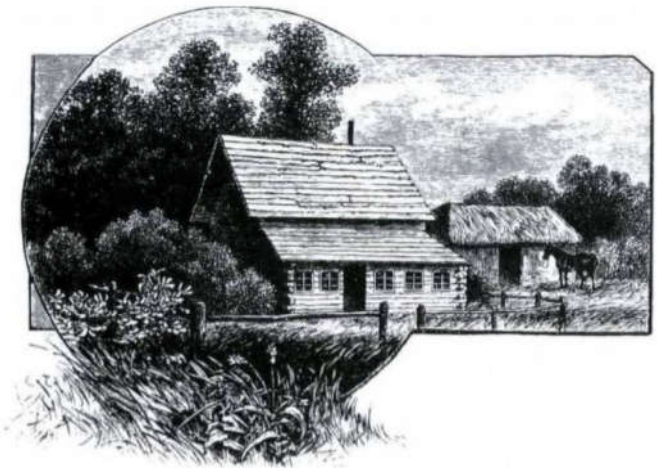
The third of the letters that Lilian Sharpe saved was dated 22 December 1885. The tragic effects of the rebellion could not be forgotten, but in this letter to England, Jessie dwelt more on family news again: It is headed Bishop's Court and begins:

My very very dear Lilian, I am really quite ashamed of myself for not having written to you before this late date, but Lilian darling it is not that I have not thought of you. No indeed, but the conglomeration of circumstances, so to speak, have until now prevented my carrying out the good intentions I have had ever since your dear letter came. This will be wofully [*sic*] late for Xmas & your birthday but my cards for you have been waiting so long & though late I send them to show you were not forgotten, & with them my warmest love.

And now you shall hear how I have spent the intervening months since your letter's arrival. First let me tell you, dear Lilian, how grieved I was to hear of your sad bereavement. I felt very sorry to hear of yr. Uncle's death. It must indeed have been to you all a sad, sad time. And then your leaving London too. It seems as if I could scarcely realize it. London without Lilian — The Sunday School without Lilian. Oh, what a blank. I cannot picture it at all.

And now to return to myself. I must tell you what I have been doing & perhaps you will forgive my seeming neglect of you. Shortly after I heard from you, I went to Winnipeg on a visit to an old friend, with Papa. My two eldest brothers & Maude accompanied us to attend School in Winnipeg.

I wrote you after the Rebellion telling all our experiences & how Papa had decided to send three



of the children away in case of further trouble this Winter. According to rumours, things are supposed to still be in an unsettled condition with regard to the Indians. The Halfbreeds have subsided now Riel has been hanged, but the Red Man is not subdued so easily. I hope however things will not grow more serious. Two Riel Rebellions suffice for me.

We had quite a delightful Journey over the Prairie going down to Qu'Appelle, the nearest railway station. The weather was exquisite, no mosquitoes or sandflies & the road splendid, except for the dust which made us appear more like Aborigines of this Country than white people, after driving all day.

I took your letter away with me, intending to write from Winnipeg, but during all the three months I spent there, there was not one day that I could have found sufficient time for writing you. There no end of amusements — Parties of all descriptions, returning calls etc. etc. Every day appeared all too short for our programme. I made a great many new friends & altogether when the time came for saying goodbye it was very hard to go. Papa & I started for home the beginning of Dec. so we are only getting settled now. It was my first experience of crossing the plains in Winter — but it was not at all bad & Papa has come to the conclusion that I am a splendid traveller. My friends in Winnipeg very much wished me to remain the Winter, but Winnie is still away, & it would have been so lonely for Mamma with both of us gone. It was very difficult to resist the temptation, I can assure you.

I went through the same experience as Mamma did last year, crossing the river through the ice in a small boat. The men thought I was most courageous. You would be perfectly horrified could you have seen the places we camped in at nights. They are the mail stopping-places & are put up in the roughest way, merely consisting of one-roomed establishments, some of them with mud floors & no windows, but there was always a stove & after driving all day in the cold, these places seemed palaces in our eyes for the time being.

When we reached home, the sad news of the very sudden death of one of my dearest friends awaited me. It was a great blow to me for I had loved her so dearly. She had been married only one year & her little boy was only two weeks old. I had known nothing of her illness & so it was a terrible shock to me. Truly "in the midst of life we are in death".

I was so sorry to hear of Mr. Graham's illness & Mrs. Graham's loss. How you will miss St. Paul's & Mr. Graham's sermons but it may be that in your new abode you will come across that missionary to whom I have before alluded, & whose sphere of work is to be in the North West. Everyone is afraid of coming here now.

I told you when I last wrote, if memory serves me right, that Mr. Hilton had been removed to Fort Macleod a long way from here, but only 24 miles from the railway now. It was arranged before he left that we were to be married in the Spring but I really won't speak with any certainty about it. I believe if it is put off again it will never be.

Mamma sends you her best love. She thinks her Xmas card to you most appropriate. I could not get a birthday one, so hope my New Year one will make up for it.

I could write you ever so much more but even now I ought to be over at the Church decorating. I have scarcely had breathing space the last week with preparations for Xmas. etc. All the superintending devolves on me. I have not laughed much since I returned home, but I often disgraced myself in Winnipeg.

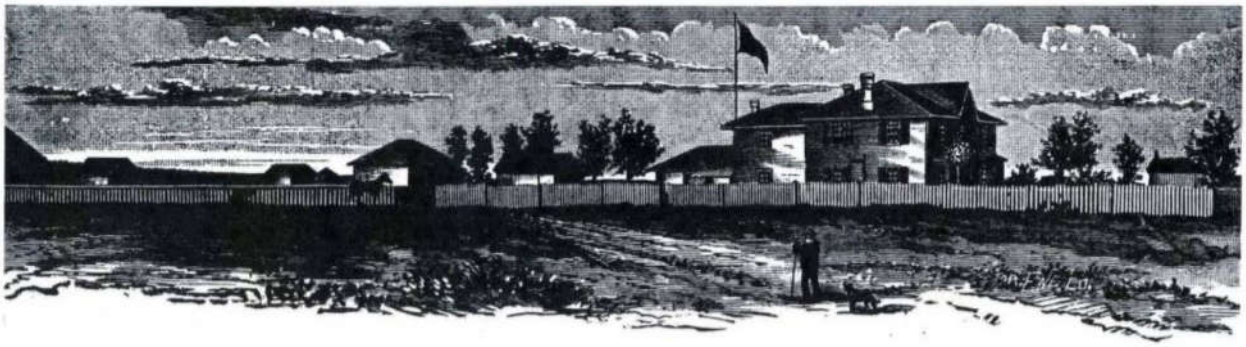
And now good bye, my dear, dear Lilian. I wish I could go with this letter & take a peep at you in your new home. Remember me with love to your Aunts & with much to yourself.

Very lovingly yr. friend
Jessie.

* * *

Ronald Hilton had not yet been ordained when he was sent to Fort Macleod late in 1885. George McKay had left that charge in April, to ride with the Alberta Field Force, as their chaplain, and to act also as scout and interpreter, particularly in the area of Fort Pitt and Frenchman's Butte, and then at Loon Lake.

When the rebellion ended, McKay was needed at Emmanuel College, and the Bishop appointed him Archdeacon — of Alberta, in name, though his work centred at Prince Albert. His senior, the Archdeacon of Saskatchewan, had been released from such duties, at the request of the government, to act for a few years



"St. Anne's Convent, formerly the residence of Hon. L. Clarke, Chief Factor of the H.B. Co." from "McPhillips' Saskatchewan Directory, 1888".

as Indian Agent at Battleford. The work of mediation on those troubled reserves required an official who was not only fluent in Cree, but who held the respect of the Indians; and the Venerable John Alexander Mackay was undeniably such a man.

That variation in the spelling of his surname was the form that he always used, but he was of the same family, first cousin actually of Factor William McKay, though twenty years younger, and from James Bay. He had studied theology at Red River, and was ordained by Bishop Anderson, but his first training had been at Moose Factory under John Horden, the noted missionary who was the model for Mackay's own remarkable work in translation and printing.

In the winter of 1875-76, Bishop McLean made the journey by dog-sled to Stanley Mission, where Mackay had served then for more than ten years, and persuaded him to leave his beloved north country to bring to the development of the whole new diocese, his experience as a missionary, his influence with the Indians, and his ability as a Cree scholar.

During his forty years of dedicated service as Archdeacon of Saskatchewan, Mackay's vigorous promotion of Indian missions, and particularly of schools, would make his name memorable in the history of the diocese. To Bishop McLean, time was not granted for the development of his large plans, nor for the fulfillment of his vision of a university in which Emmanuel would be an affiliated college.

That had all ended for him when his daughter wrote again to England. The letter from Fort Macleod, Alberta, N.W.T. is dated 28 February 1887:

> **My very dear Lilian,** It is a long, long time since I have written to you & since my last letter I have passed through much of both joy & sorrow. You will have ere this received the paper we sent you & know the terrible loss we have sustained by the death so unexpected of my dear Father. Oh Lilian dear, it has been *such* a trial, & coming so soon after my marriage & so without warning I can yet hardly realize that all the misery of the past few months is really true.
>
> My husband & I have only been here three weeks since our return from Prince Albert where we were so hastily summoned to Papa's deathbed. We started at once, late on the night of Nov. 6th. but alas were too late, for dear Papa died on the 7th., Sunday & by travelling night and day across the prairies we were only in time to see the dear remains. When we reached Qu'Appelle, the nearest railway station to P.A., my husband found a telegram to say all was over & he broke it to me. The shock was so terrible that I was quite ill, but we pushed on, driving day & night & managing the 260 mls. in 3 days.
>
> I cannot tell you of the desolation at home. Mamma is completely broken down & there is oh such a blank in all our hearts. The last time I had seen dear Papa alive was on my wedding day when he married us. He was so happy that day for he thought so highly of my dear husband. After the wedding breakfast we started & Papa & Mamma & Winnie all drove the first 22 mls with us & we had tea & then parted. When it came to saying Good-bye, I felt such a strange presentiment of coming evil but dear Papa talked so hopefully of our meeting soon again that I tried to put if off.
>
> Four days after my marriage, Papa left with my third brother for a diocesan tour. While away, Mamma had a little baby, such a dear wee boy, & Papa was very anxious to get back to her. While they were driving down some very steep hill, the rig upset & Papa was thrown out. He went on, however, a short distance but was obliged to return to the nearest place where he lay three weeks very ill & delirious. At the end of that time he had a boat made & put his bedding in it & they returned by the river. They were 22 days on the way & my brother never thought that Papa would live to reach home. The cold & the privations he suffered fairly

turn our hearts when we think of them. Once at home, he got very much better & was up & about the house a week before his death. Only two days before did the Doctor anticipate danger & we were telegraphed for, together with the children at school in Winnipeg.

Just a few hours before we left here on our sad journey, your dear letter came with the beautiful card. Do you remember that you wished I might have this, the richest of all gifts, God's blessing in my new life & that it might encircle me & *help me to bear trials if they came*. I was standing on the very threshold of the greatest trial I had ever known & you do not know, dear Lilian, how reading that wish of yours helped me. I thought afterwards it must have come just then to comfort me.

Just three months from my wedding day, I was carried into the home I had left so happy, unconscious, & to see my dead father. How sorrow & joy go hand in hand. In the midst of life we are in death. What should we do in such trials as these if we had not the blessed hope of meeting our loved ones beyond the grave where there shall be no more parting or sorrow. The longest life here is but short & we know how near our time is. How sorrow draws our thoughts from earthly things & makes us realize their insignificance compared to those which are eternal.

Your wish that I might be very rich in my husband's love has been truly realized. Oh, Lilian dear, I cannot tell you all he is to me & all he has been during our great sorrow. I never realized how much he really was to me until this trial came. Not only was he my comforter but Mamma & all the rest of the family found in him their chief earthly help. He is so strong, so loving & tender & Mamma got to rely on him so that it was very hard when we had to leave her.

We left home Jan. 5th. & most of our journey it was 60° below zero, but contrary to everyone's anticipations I got safely over my journey. We delayed our return as I was quite ill, but I could not let my husband return here to his work alone & he shrank from the idea though he felt fearful of my running any risks.

I received your other letter quite safely but with all the busy time of preparation I kept putting off writing until I had time for a good long letter. After my marriage, there was all the business of getting settled & as servants are not to be had here for love or money I was especially busy, but I often thought of you & of how I would write to tell you of my happy wedding etc. & then this sorrow came, which makes the remembrance of the joy very painful.

In May, Mamma & I went to Winnipeg as Mamma was not well & wished to consult a good doctor. While there, I took the chance of buying my trousseau. I must tell you the strange dream I had repeatedly while there, about my wedding dress. I dreamt the same dream every time, that the morning of my wedding had come & when I put on my white satin dress, I looked around & the train, instead of being white, was black cashmere. I thought we were so horrified & Mamma wanted to sew white cotton over it but I said No, it is too late. It must be as it is.

This dream came so often that it made a great impression on me & on Mamma. Many of my friends also thought it strange & certainly now it seems to have been a warning though six months before. I remember when going to try on the dress I told the dressmaker, & I kept turning to look at the train all the time to see if it was black. These things are very strange, are they not?

I am writing this letter very quickly. I hope it will be intelligible. You will perceive I have tried to get a large amount in very small space. Will you thank your Aunts for their kind wishes & give them my best love?

Christmas was a very sad time to us all, but I thought of you & remembered it was your birthday. Dear, dear Lilian, how I should love to see you, if we were only nearer & you could come & stay for ever so long with us. We are very cosy in the house we are in. I wish you could see us.

My husband is very busy at present trying to collect funds to rebuild the Church which was burned here last Spring. I do not care for this part of the Northwest as much as Prince Albert. It is not so cold, but very windy & for such a *helpless* creature as you know I am at getting about, the winds are decidedly objectionable.

We are quite near the Rocky Mountains & the view of them is beautiful. Next summer we hope to take a trip into the Mountains.

You told me of your sister's intended marriage. I suppose ere this the knot has been tied. I hope she is very, very happy. And when is your Prince Charming coming, Lilian? I expect to hear of him soon & I know he will be someone very good & nice if he wins your love.

And now, Good-bye, dearest Lilian. Forgive my long silence & write to your ever loving & affectionate friend soon.

Always lovingly,
Jessie Hilton

My husband wishes his kindest remembrances. ♦

Regina historian Ruth M. Buck's most recent contribution to "The Beaver" was an account of early postal service on the Red River (October/November 1986).

Artists of the Quilting Bee

Colours of History

By P. Colleen Archer

"Into every one of Canada's quilts is sewn the cultural and social history of Canada. If you look closely, the political and economic history of our country also becomes evident for, as in other art forms, quilts always reflect the environment in which they were created."
— **Mary Conway in *300 Years of Canada's Quilts***
Griffin House, Toronto, 1976.

While fine examples of heritage quilts exist in museums and homes across the country, often no written material accompanies them to explain where and how they were created. For this reason the Canadian Quilters' Association is conducting a heritage quilt search, and groups like the Pine Needle Quilters' Guild in Petawawa, Ontario, are seeking out old quilts and documenting their history.

"Quilts show the history of an area through the women of that area," says Guild president Linda Spagnolo. "Often their history wasn't documented, and our documenting of quilts right now has to do with women's search for roots."

One quilt brought in for a show in May 1990 is believed to be almost a century old. The quilt belonged to the Munroe family of Petawawa and it is now owned by Mrs. Norma Corbett. The notes accompanying the quilt illustrate how documentation can help to preserve local history:

> Norma can remember, as a girl, going to quilting bees at Petawawa Point. Each week the older women of the cottage community would meet on someone's front porch for tea and quilting. The Munroe Cottage (now owned by Norma and her husband) still stands at Petawawa Point on Alexandra Street.

When she was a child Mrs. Corbett often combed wool to put in the quilts, and she says that different fillings were used depending on what was on hand. Some old quilts used pure cotton as the batting, and sometimes you can still find the seeds.

Quilting came to Canada with the first pioneer women who brought from France, England and other European countries the sewing skills they had learned in the "Old World". Their main problem in creating warm bed coverings for their families was not a lack of knowledge or skill, but rather a scarcity of materials. While cloth was imported into New France during the seventeenth century, the shipments were irregular. Meanwhile production of cloth locally was a long and arduous process. It could take up to two years to raise sheep for shearing and then turn their wool into carded quilt linings, so feathers or even cattail down were often used instead.

A direct result of the scarcity of materials and the hard economic conditions was the development of the patchwork quilt, using pieces of worn-out material dyed with methods learned from the Indians.

"Those old quilts are the real North American art," says present-day art-quilter Eva Bishop, "because it was over here that the art itself was developed."

Thrift and practicality were just as important in the Maritimes as in New France. The earliest quilt found in Nova Scotia was made in Cumberland County in the early 1800s, and it is made from worn homespun clothing in drab browns with no particular arrangement of the patterned cloth. Not all quilts were strictly utilitarian, however, and gay colours characterized the quilts made by Acadians who settled around the Bay of Fundy.

In 1753 about 2,000 Protestant German farmers came to Halifax and settled at Lunenburg, starting a strong tradition of quilting in that area. Meanwhile in Prince Edward Island French settlers and later Scottish settlers used pieces of worn-out clothing to make either traditional quilts or the popular crazy quilts which utilized any size or shape of scrap.

While the majority of the United Empire Loyalists who came to Upper Canada in the late eighteenth century arrived with few possessions and had to use any bit of material they could find in their quilts, there was also a small number from the gentry who brought with them the art of the all-embroidered quilt, the applique quilt (figures cut from one fabric are sewn onto a larger piece of fabric), and the solid-coloured quilt.

The economic depression in Great Britain which came at the end of the Napoleonic Wars brought set-

From "300 Years of Canada's Quilts".

Quilters of Sudbury, Ontario, work on a "Star of Bethlehem" quilt during World War II.

tlers of British origin whose quilts reflected the styles then in fashion in England. Meanwhile the Pennsylvania "Dutch" of German origin who settled around Waterloo, Welland and Lincoln County were creating geometric patterns in primitive colours using folk motifs that are still found today. From the mid-1800s quilts were often made as decoration, and in Victorian crazy patchwork, oddly-shaped pieces of luxury fabrics were basted to firm cotton and the seams heavily embroidered with gold or coloured silk.

The lockstitching machine was patented in 1846, and in 1851 Isaac Singer introduced a machine with a straight, vertical needle which freed countless women from endless hours of handstitching.

During the last half of the nineteenth century Northern Ontario and the West began to be settled. The quilts in the West are characterized by the intermingling of several cultures. Mennonites from Russia brought a tradition of making wool quilts, and Finnish women, skilled in weaving, assimilated quilting methods. English women made quilted bed coverings, and some also wore quilted garments as protection against the cold.

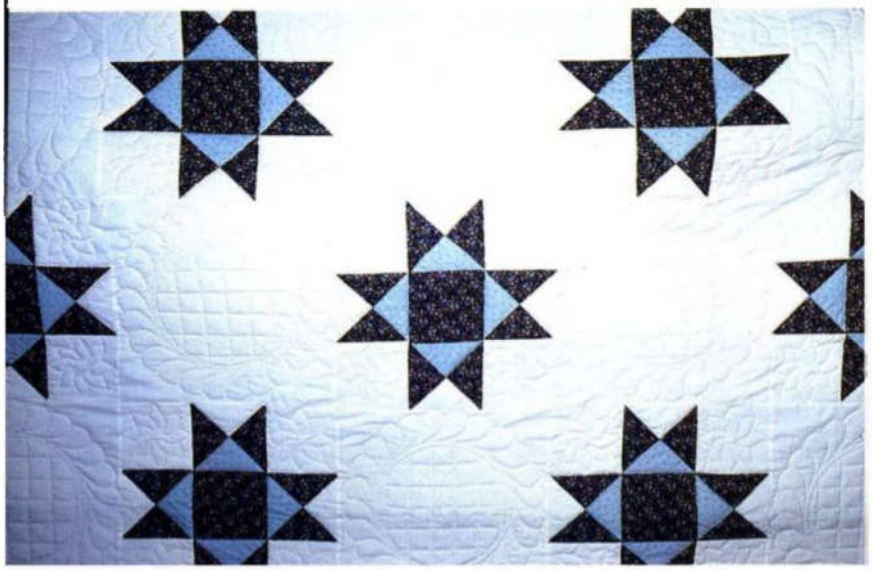
A popular quilt for fund raising during this period was the autograph or signature quilt where for a small fee people could write their names either in India ink, or else in pencil to be embroidered by the quilters later. There were also friendship quilts which might be made for a bride-to-be, for someone in distress, for a dignitary, or for someone moving away.

The making of a quilt has always been an ideal opportunity for co-operative work in the form of a quilting bee. A bee is simply a gathering of people to do a large job together, usually with some form of entertainment and refreshment afterwards. In the early days the hostess would have a quilt top ready for quilting (quilting is the stitching together of the top, the filling and the backing), and the guests would secure the top to the frame, quilt it, and remove it from the frame the same day.

Co-operative quiltmaking still goes on today. In Pembroke, Ontario recently, the "Quilters' Corners" store provided fabrics and supplies for a "Quilt-A-Thon" with all proceeds donated to the Bernadette McCann House for women and children in crisis. Mary-Ann Vanner of Quilters' Corners gives quilting classes in the Pembroke area, and pieced quilts in traditional patterns continue to be popular amongst her students. These traditional patterns have names like Maple Leaf (sometimes called Tea Leaf in the United States), Wedding Ring, Dresden Plate and Log Cabin. The Log Cabin design is one of the earliest and most popular. The traditional red square in the centre depicts the fire in the hearth, and all Log Cabin patterns are built out from a center square with pieced logs that become progressively larger as they approach the edge of the block.

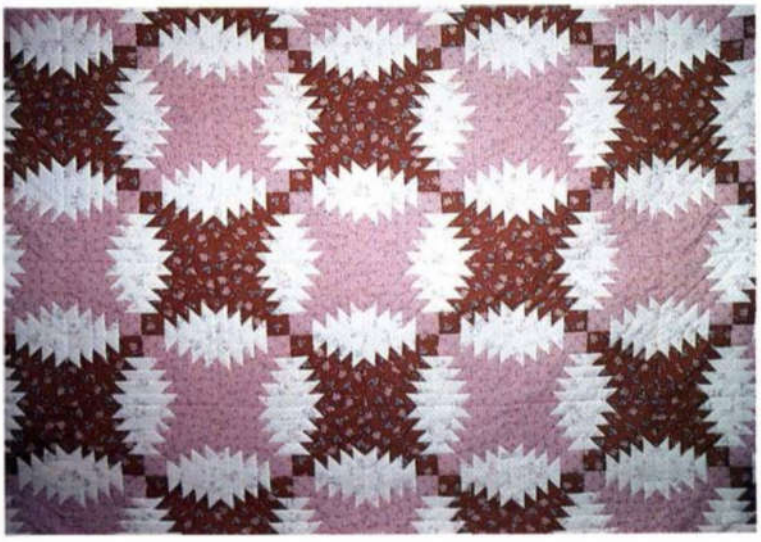
Some quilt names like the LeMoyne Star are connected directly with history. The original LeMoyne family came to New France to build a manor house opposite Montreal on the shore of the St. Lawrence River. In 1699 two of Le Seigneur LeMoyne's sons were sent to govern Louisiana where they founded and settled New Orleans in 1718. The quilting pattern was named in their honour, and variations evolved including the Star of Bethlehem and the Lone Star.

The shift to machine-made manufacturing from handwork in the early twentieth century reflects the



The "LeMoyne Star" is featured in this quilt worked by Mary-Ann Vanner and her pupils.

Mary-Ann Vanner displays samples of her needlework.



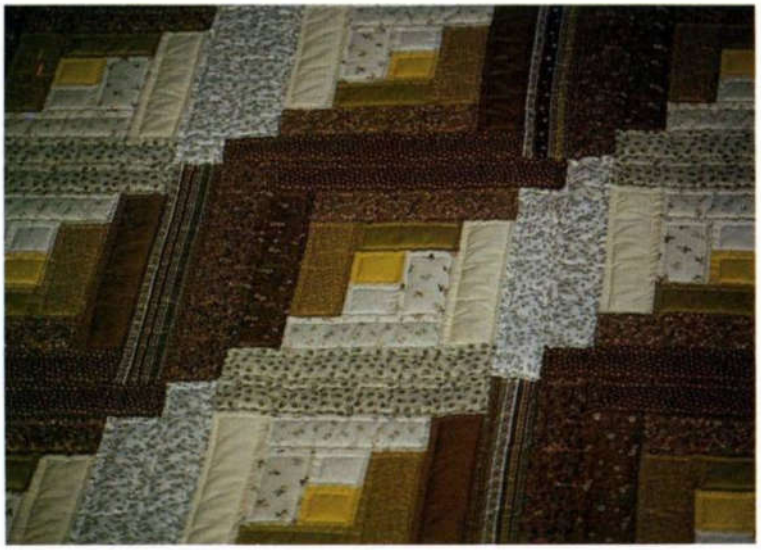
The "Pineapple" design, from a quilt made by Mary-Ann Vanner and her friends.

Details from the "Laura" design, in a quilt made by Bonnie Doer Mitchell.

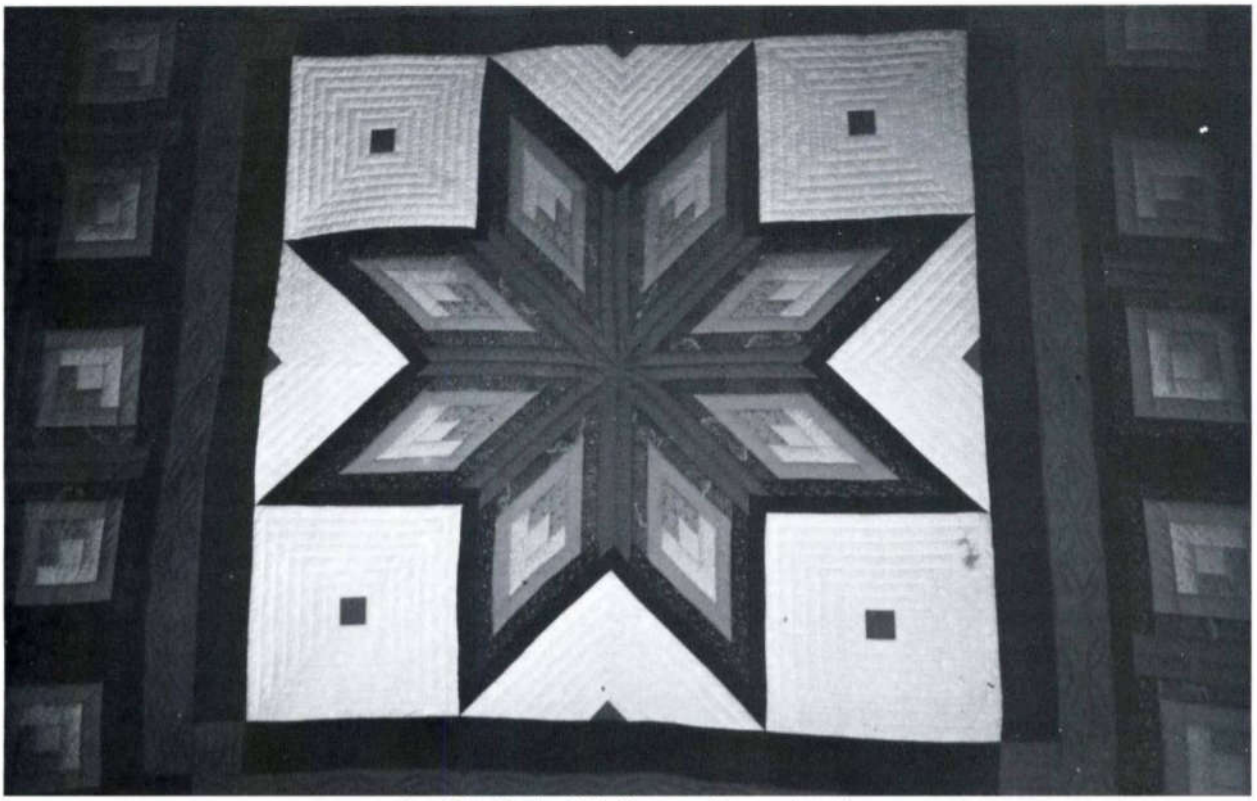
Western Development Museum, Saskatoon

Detail from a quilt made by Annie McClung from items of clothing formerly worn by members of the McClung family, including the famous writer and suffragist Nellie McClung.

Quilted cushion cover dated 1889, made by Annie King, a seamstress to Queen Victoria.



A variation on the "Log Cabin" design, from a quilt by Bonnie Doer Mitchell.



"Log Cabin Star" quilt by Mary-Ann Vanner and pupils.

shift in women's lifestyles as many began to enter the work force, drive cars, shorten their dresses, and agitate for the vote. Utilitarian quilts for war relief were made at bees in World War I, followed by a period in which quilting was done largely by church groups or Women's Institutes. Politically, women like Nellie McClung were still struggling to be recognized as "persons under the law", and to be enfranchised.

Nellie was encouraged in her writing and political activism by her mother-in-law Annie McClung who started an elaborate silk and satin crazy patchwork coverlet in 1883. This quilt, now in the Western Development Museum in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, contains pieces of clothing from family members including Nellie. It was given to Nellie's daughter Florence in 1928, the same year Nellie and her colleagues succeeded in having the old law stating that women were not persons in matters of rights and privileges removed from the statute books of Canada.

With the Great Depression of the thirties, utilitarian quilting was once more an economic necessity for many families. Two types of quilts were made during World War II: functional quilts for bombed-out war victims, and decorative quilts for war bond fund-raising. The decorative quilts often had a patriotic theme in red, white and blue.

The postwar years saw another decline in quilting until its recognition by professional artists as an art medium in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the 1970s the National Gallery of Canada first displayed the quilted works of artist Joyce Wieland who was quoted in 1975 as saying that "eventually women's concerns and my own femininity became my artist's territory."

Typical of art quilters today is Bonnie Doer Mitchell of Petawawa who uses traditional methods to create innovative works for a worldwide market. Bonnie likes to meet with a client for several hours before starting a quilt so that she can work the family's history into her final design.

By carrying on the quilting tradition, women like Bonnie Doer Mitchell continue to reflect the cultural and social society of Canada in a craft that has evolved from an economic necessity into a valued and respected art form. ♦

P. Colleen Archer is a freelance writer and editor. She lives in Deep River, Ontario. Coloured photographs, unless otherwise noted, are by Michael H.D. Blore.

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'The Happy Warrior'

Fernand Ouellet: Another View of Quebec

Twenty-five years ago, a professor named Fernand Ouellet (pronounced "wuh-LET") produced a thick book which has been hailed as the most important contribution of an entire generation of Canadian historians. Ouellet himself, who turns sixty-five this year, has recently been described by Jack Granatstein as a master historian, one of this country's most important. He has won acclaim, Governor-General's Awards, and many honours. Yet the man and his ideas remain little known outside the small circle of academic historians in Canada.

One might guess Ouellet's anonymity merely reflects English Canada's usual lack of knowledge about even the most famous cultural and intellectual celebrities of French Canada. But Ouellet has lived and worked outside Quebec for most of his career, and there will be few celebrations of his achievements there. Ouellet has swum against the currents of Quebecois opinion all his life, and his historical judgments have made him deeply unpopular among Quebec historians.

Who is this Fernand Ouellet who is so highly praised, yet unknown in most of Canada and actually reviled by many Quebec intellectuals?

At 65, Ouellet is strong and stocky. His capacity for work is legendary, but he has the good health of a man who walks and bicycles frequently. On first appearance, he seems reserved, a man without much small talk, and his personality really emerges only when he begins talking of ideas. Whether he is reeling off statistics or denouncing rival historians, he combines masses of complex information with a core of passionately-held views.

Those views have provided a shape to his career for over forty years. The title of the masterwork he published in 1966, *The Economic and Social History of Quebec*, sums up his enduring themes. His subject has always been Quebec and its historical evolution from the days of New France to the Quiet Revolution of the sixties. He has always seen what he calls "social and economic structures" — the economy and the way that it shapes Quebec society — as the vital issues of Quebec history, the meat of all his work.

Fernand Ouellet

To study social structures and the economic forces that shape them, Ouellet turned to statistics. All his works are dense, technical, and crammed with charts and tables on per-capita exports, population changes, and the price of wheat. None of this makes for easy reading, but the figures allowed Ouellet to create his own sequence of economic history. In effect, he could begin to chart recessions, booms, and Gross National Products for the 1790s, just as we expect economic forecasters to do today. And the sheer weight of the numerical evidence he amassed carried tremendous authority. *The Economic and Social History of Quebec*, by its aims and by its methods, was a pioneering Canadian example of what historians today mean when they speak of "social history".

The Economic and Social History of Quebec alone would have secured Ouellet's scholarly reputation. But the ideas Ouellet drew from his study were explosive — and they made him permanently controversial.

In the first place, Ouellet deflated the Conquest of 1763. The British conquest, for those who mourned it as for those who celebrated it, had always been the crucial moment in the history of French Canada. Not at all, said Ouellet: after the Conquest people did the same work, lived the same lives, held the same attitudes as they had before. There was a new ruler, he said, but for nearly everyone, life went on as before. If the social structures did not change, the Conquest could hardly be so important as had been claimed.

Ouellet's economic data convinced him that the really vital change came not in 1763, but about

1800. The fur trade declined and the lumber trade began to emerge. Above all, farming, the backbone of French Canada no matter who ruled, went into crisis. Farmland became scarce, crop yields plunged, competitors took over the markets, and poverty began to stalk the farm families of French Canada. Suddenly a whole society's way of life was in danger.

When he studied how French Canada responded to this crisis, Ouellet deflated the reputations of the Patriotes who led the rebellions of 1837-38 in Lower Canada. Quebec and its historians had celebrated Louis-Joseph Papineau and his followers as ill-starred but valiant leaders of the French-Canadian nation against its foreign oppressor. Ouellet, however, portrayed them as a reactionary middle-class clique who invented the idea of a French-Canadian nation and used it to serve their own interests. By the 1830s, the ordinary people of Lower Canada desperately needed leadership in economic change, argued Ouellet, but they got nationalist slogans and a failed uprising instead.

Such arguments made Ouellet the leading anti-nationalist historian of Quebec — a role he has held ever since. Ouellet argues that Quebecois historians have always elevated "the national over the social" — that is, they have downplayed divisions within the society of French Canada in order to portray one harmonious French-Canadian nation united against a foreign foe. Ouellet denies the existence of this unified, harmonious nation in French Canadian history. "My focus on the economic forces leads to the idea of competition and conflicts within society. It leads to the idea of class."

Ouellet's anti-national stance offended many. After *The Economic and Social History of Quebec* appeared, his conclusions were rejected and denounced, and the word "traitor" was used. "A professor in Montreal, before one hundred students, put the book on the floor and he walked on it." Ouellet smiles as he tells the story, but he remembers.

Ouellet never shrank from the debate his ideas provoked. He is famous for long, immensely detailed book reviews intended to demolish the follies and fallacies he detects in other historians' works. In conversation, he cites book after book invalidated by the nationalist biases of their authors. He calls himself "a happy fighter" and says he does not take these arguments personally, but he is aware of the enmities he has provoked, and he no longer attends many historical conferences and meetings. "In the historical writing of Quebec, I am there even if I am absent," he says. "I can see my impact even if they do not mention me. Without being there, I have had the influence."

One of Ouellet's most sustained debates has been with fellow historian Jean-Pierre Wallot. Wallot rejects Ouellet's case for an economic crisis around 1800 and sees in the nationalism of the Patriotes a normal and healthy reaction to French Canada's situation. Wallot's career has been as distinguished as Ouellet's, and he is today the National Archivist of Canada. But their debate is as fierce as ever. In print, Wallot dismisses Ouellet's central arguments as "myths" and Ouellet retorts, "In the hands of. . . Wallot, the history of Quebec becomes a kind of 'fairy tale'."

Quebec's nationalist historians might find Ouellet easier to dismiss if he were a foreigner, but his roots go deep in traditional Quebec society. He was born in the pioneer Lac St-Jean region of northern Quebec, the oldest of five children. "He could sign his name, I think," recalls Ouellet of his lumberman father. "All our family went to the shanties in winter. Until I was nine, I went to school in the fall and in the spring, and we were away in the shanty all winter, because my mother cooked for the men." Their home had a single book, a history of the Patriotes which his mother had won as a school prize. But Ouellet and his siblings eventually got an education, and he went on to *collège classique* ("My mother wanted a priest") and to Laval University in Quebec City, where he soon substituted an historical vocation for the priestly one.

Since 1965, Ouellet has taught at universities in Ontario, first in Ottawa, then in Toronto. "In Quebec universities in the 1950s and 1960s, the atmosphere was very clerical. And in the 1970s and 1980s it was very nationalist. It would have been difficult to work there." There was also the matter of an extraordinary lawsuit launched by descendants of Louis-Joseph Papineau, in which Ouellet was found to have libelled the dead. As a result, a book Ouellet had written was destroyed by its publisher, and Ouellet abandoned his biography of Papineau. It has never appeared.

However, Ouellet does not see himself as an exile. "I think I was very fortunate," he says of the move to Ottawa, though he agrees it was hard learning enough English at the age of 38 to begin giving lectures just two months after he arrived. "It is good to travel. I learned a lot. Culturally and intellectually it opened up a lot of things." He takes evident pride and pleasure in the way his daughters — he has three,

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all adults now — grew up fully bilingual, while he himself still struggles with the English language.

In 1990, when Pierre-Elliott Trudeau and his closest political allies celebrated the legacy of the Trudeau years in a collection of essays entitled *Towards a Just Society*, Fernand Ouellet was among the essayists. At first glance, his piece looks ill-at-ease among the political memoirs of *Towards a Just Society*. He is the only contributor who was neither a colleague of Trudeau nor a familiar political commentator. Ouellet and Trudeau have only met a few times, and Ouellet has never been politically active. Unlike the other contributions, his essay is written in the uncompromising Ouellet style, dense with statistics, rife with footnotes, and concerned with the long evolution of Quebec society.

Yet the essay fits. In it, Ouellet concludes that with the Quiet Revolution, Quebec completed a difficult process of modernization and became a society like others of the modern world. Its very success, he says, demonstrates that independence is not indispensable to Quebec's future. The historian's position is similar to the one Trudeau has always taken in the political realm. "There is an affinity," says Ouellet. "Individual rights have been very important to both of us. Collective rights, the collectivity, that goes back to the nation, to the idea of homogeneity."

Ouellet seems in many ways an academic equivalent of Trudeau. He too has been a lone warrior, iconoclastic and pugnacious and deeply resented by many Quebecers. Like Trudeau, Ouellet is deeply hostile to nationalism in all its guises. He sees it as distorting much of the historical writing about Quebec, by prejudiced English Canadians as much as by patriotic French Canadians.

Above all, Ouellet insists that the idea of the Quebec nation has always been rooted in a concept of race — a belief in a blood tie that makes real differences among Quebecers impossible. Such a concept may be easy to find in the priest-historians who once made the French-Canadians a chosen people with a common destiny, but Ouellet also sees it at work today.

"Recently I heard of a senior member of the Bélanger-Campeau Commission, commenting on the article that Mordecai Richler wrote in *The New Yorker* about Quebec. His reaction was 'Richler is not a member of the family.' Blood, you see, homogeneity. And this man is supposed to be a federalist!"

Ouellet's anti-nationalism makes him a vigorous foe not only of the Parti Québecois, but also of Robert Bourassa's Liberal Party and Brian Mulroney's constitutional ideas. "You know there are two separatist parties in Quebec today. There is the PQ. And then there is the party of painless independence — Bourassa. And the distinct society is the vehicle of that."

Ouellet's aversion to nationalism sometimes seems extreme — as Trudeau's sometimes does. Both seem to denounce all forms of national, ethnic, or community pride as evil. If the francophones of Quebec value their unique community and aspire to preserve and enhance it, must Ouellet and Trudeau find bigotry, bias, and intolerance lurking just beneath the surface?

On the other hand, Ouellet knows something of the pain of enforced conformity. "When you come from a rural family, sometimes you know about the burdens of a close rural society, and you want to escape from that, from the restrictions. Well, for the historians of Quebec . . . the most important word was nation and what made the nation was community, was homogeneity. And I had seen that, I knew a little the restrictions of that, and I wanted to be free of it. I know that when you want to be free of the community, you pay a price."

Fernand Ouellet, even more than the rich-kid Trudeau, personifies the brilliant successes of Quebec society in the last half-century. The illiterate logger's son has grown into a sophisticated cosmopolitan who thrives in a busy urban *milieu* and could hold his own anywhere in the world. Yet for questioning the fashionable idea that French Canadians have always been one people united against a common foe, he finds himself alienated from many of his fellow Quebecers. Little wonder that he looks at nationalism with a jaundiced eye.

It has been suggested that all Quebecers are either *habitants*, who stick close to their native soil, or *voyageurs*, who roam far and wide. Such stereotyping does not really work — how would you classify someone like René Lévesque? Ouellet, happily working in Toronto and unruffled by what they say of him back home, seems emphatically a *voyageur*. Indeed it is not hard to imagine him slogging relentlessly across the portages, slapping down pesky mosquitoes.

But would he be willing to keep time with all the other paddlers?

Fernand Ouellet's most recent book is "Economy, Class, and Nation in Quebec," a collection of his essays in English translation. It was published in 1991 by Copp Clark Pitman.

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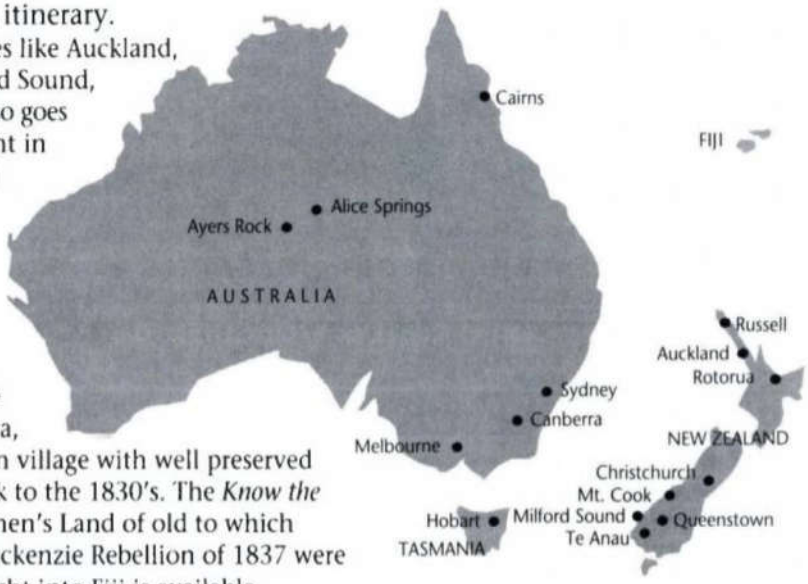

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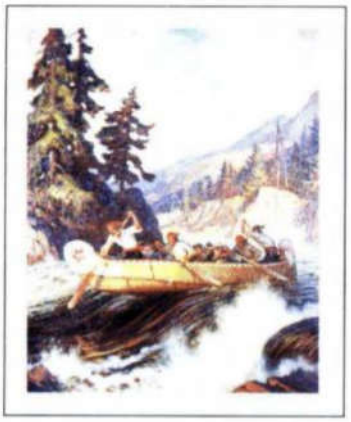

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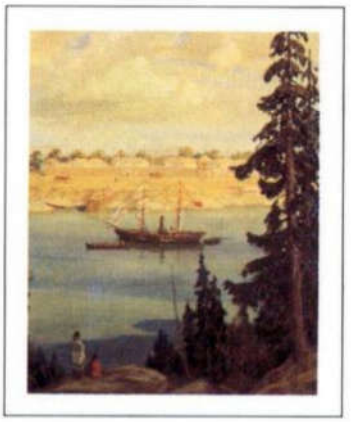

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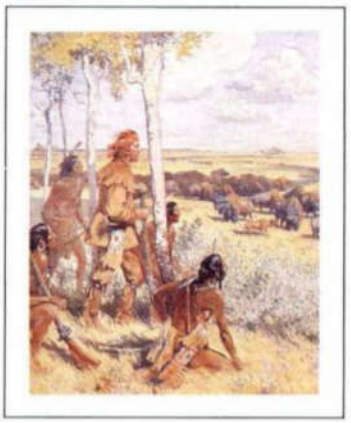

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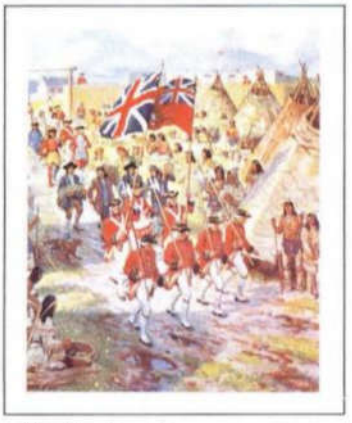

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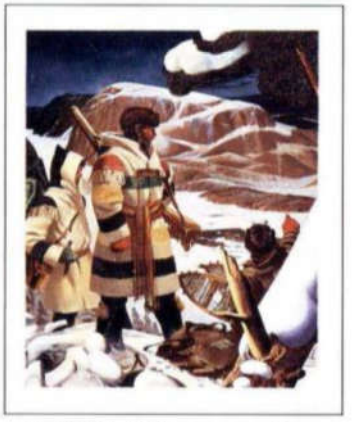

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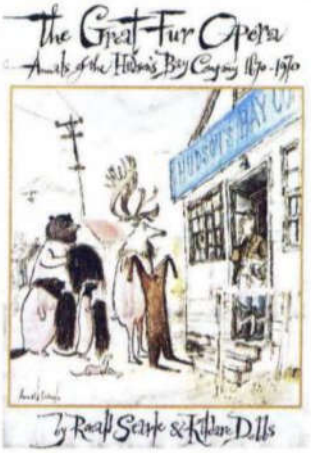

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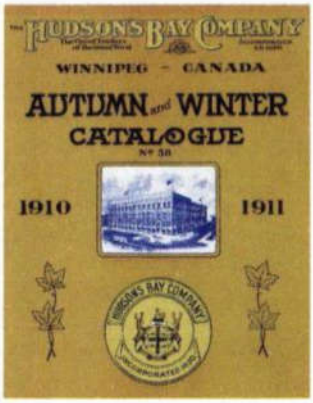

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On the Italian Front

By Robert Saunders

THE D-DAY DODGERS

By Daniel G. Dancocks. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, 1991. 508 pp. illus. $34.95.

History, we are told by Aristotle, is what Alcibiades did and suffered. Historians often become so absorbed in their charts and statistics and the other apparatus of their trade that they run the risk of forgetting Aristotle's dictum. Carlyle's "Dryasdust" still dominates our academic journals.

There are, however, encouraging signs in Canada and elsewhere that an interest in well-researched and well-written narrative history is reviving. Daniel G. Dancocks, who died recently at far too early an age, was one of the foremost practitioners of this art. His six books, all dealing with aspects of the two world wars of this century, were distinguished not only by careful research but also by a keen sense of what makes a good story and how to tell that story effectively. He had been a journalist before becoming an historian and he was a credit to both of these professions.

The D-Day Dodgers, his account of the Canadian troops in Sicily and Italy in World War II, was the last book Mr. Dancocks was to write. Its virtues become clear when it is read alongside G.W.L. Nicholson's volume on the same subject, *The Canadians in Italy, 1943-1945*. Lt.-Col. Nicholson's book, written in 1956, was a model for other writers of official military histories to follow. It was comprehensive, the facts were superbly well marshalled, the maps were excellent, the writing was clear and the judgements were sound. Inevitably, however, in a book written barely a decade after the events it described, there was little in the way of personal reminiscences from those who took part in the fighting and this gave a somewhat chilly, inhuman feel to Lt.-Col. Nicholson's book.

Since 1956 scores of articles and books by veterans of the fighting in Italy have appeared. Mr. Dancocks' bibliography fills more than six pages and many of the books he cites are of this kind. Authors such as Farley Mowat are included, but the greater number are by less-well-known writers. Mr. Dancocks collated this extensive material to produce a vivid narrative of heroism and suffering. Lt.-Col. Nicholson's book tended, of necessity, to be somewhat pedestrian. Mr. Dancocks, on the other hand, conveys a sense of urgency, of perils faced and agonies endured.

No sane person thinks of war itself as anything other than hellish and Mr. Dancocks' book is not a glorifying of war. Mr. Dancocks rightly steered well clear of purple prose or windy rhetoric. What he has done is simply to tell what was accomplished by those who fought in the choking dust of Sicilian fields or on the chilly slopes of Italian mountains. His straightforward narration amounts to a salute to those who died and it is all the tribute these young men would have wanted.

There was a need for such a book as this. The battles in North Africa and in France have been fought and re-fought in countless volumes, but the war in Italy has been largely neglected by professional historians. Even at the time — especially after D-Day in Normandy — the Italian

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campaign was looked upon as a sideshow. It was the "forgotten" war. The same holds true for Slim's battles in Burma and for a similar reason.

By 1943 the United States had replaced Britain as the dominant partner in the Western alliance against the Axis powers. When strategists differed it was, more often than not, the views of President Roosevelt and George Marshall that prevailed.

When the Germans were finally driven out of North Africa early in 1943, the Allies were faced with difficult choices. Where should the next blow be struck? In essence, the view of Roosevelt and Marshall was that the way to win the war was to plunge into France as soon as possible and smash through to Germany.

Winston Churchill was no less sure that the main battleground must be France but, with his memories of the slaughter in the earlier war, he wanted first to weaken Germany at the circumference of its European empire. Furthermore, he was apt to be seduced by his own splendid phrases and once he had referred to Italy as "the soft underbelly of Europe" he was inclined to regard the Italian campaign in those terms, however different the reality might be.

Because it could draw off German troops from France, the Americans tolerated the Italian campaign and, indeed, their Fifth Army under General Mark Clark played a part in the fighting. It was, however, mainly thought of as a British and Commonwealth show and Marshall made sure that priority in shipping, weapons and troops continued to be given to the northern European front.

Mr. Dancocks dealt with these themes of higher strategy with the same sure touch that he displayed in describing the fighting on the ground. In the last analysis, though, it is not the military planners but the fighting soldiers — the "poor, bloody infantry" above all — who win the wars. Duncan Fraser, one of the D-Day Dodgers quoted by Mr. Dancocks, summed it all up with stark and eloquent simplicity. "The war in Italy was cruel and dirty," he wrote. "Under-equipped with everything but spirit, guts and determination, the Canadians in Italy made a reputation as tough and courageous fighters. They slugged victoriously northwards against an implacable, efficient and seasoned enemy army, through the most difficult and heartbreaking terrain encountered by any army in the Second World War."

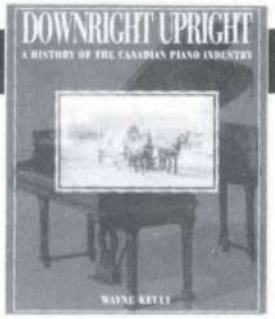
Mr. Fraser went on to say that there were still here in Canada many widows of soldiers killed in Italy nearly half a century ago. "If for no other reason than this," he wrote, "we should as a nation honour the Canadians who fought, bled and died in that far-off land."

Mr. Dancocks was a popular historian in the best sense of that term. His books were all of a high calibre, but *The D-Day Dodgers* was one of the finest of these, perhaps equalled only by *Welcome to Flanders Fields*, his inspiring and moving account of the Second Battle of Ypres. His death is a serious loss to Canadian scholarship and it is greatly to be regretted that we shall not now be able to read the book on the 1944 invasion of Normandy on which he was working when he died.

Robert Saunders is a frequent contributor to "The Beaver."

IN SUNNY ITALY

The nick-name "D-Day Dodgers" is alleged to have been given Allied soldiers who fought on the Italian front by British MP Nancy, Lady Astor, indicating that they had dodged the "big show" in Normandy. The troops replied with a song, set to the tune of "Lilli Marlene". A sample verse: "We landed at Salerno, a holiday with pay,/ The Jerrys came to greet us and speed us on our way./ Showed us the sights and gave us tea, we all sang songs, the beer was free,/ To welcome D-Day Dodgers to sunny Italy."



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Peter C. Newman's History of the HBC

A View from the Dustbin

By Michael Bliss

MERCHANT PRINCES
By Peter C. Newman. Viking, Toronto, 1991. 502 pp., illus. $29.99.

What shall we say of Peter C. Newman, journalist and popular historian? He has now finished his three-volume story of the history of the Hudson's Bay Company, for which he received the largest advance ($500,000) in the history of Canadian publishing. For the first two volumes he received a certain amount of critical praise. The dustjacket of volume three, *Merchant Princes*, carries enthusiastic comments about the earlier books from *The Smithsonian* ("rollicking tale of capitalism . . ."), the *Montreal Gazette*, *Chicago Tribune*, Pierre Berton, *Newsday* ("capitalism in the wild and some terrific story-telling"), the *Toronto Star*, *London Daily Express* ("a thrilling, chilling story . . ."), the *Washington Post*, and the *Los Angeles Times* ("the journalist's instinct for the colourful and often off-colour anecdote").

There are not many off-colour anecdotes in *Merchant Princes*, even if we count the statement that Sir William "Tony" Keswick, "the Hudson's Bay Company's last merchant adventurer" has buttons on the flies of his trousers in case his zipper sticks, but it is quite possible that this book will receive praise from similar sources. It is another epic saga of raw capitalism on the hoof, full of larger-than-life stories about larger-than-life fur traders, most notably "Labrador Smith", i.e. Donald Smith, Lord Strathcona, "The Man Who Became a Country". Several chapters describe the HBC's adventures trading in the Arctic, others consider the "Trans-Atlantic Blood Feud" between "The Lords and the Good Old Boys" before the HBC was Canadianized. The book ends with lengthy profiles of Kenneth Thomson and his son David. The latter, whose continuing connection with the HBC is somewhat murky, is presented as the "Last Lord of the Bay".

Newman does not make much use in this volume of the Company's sixty-eight tons of archival material, which these days he refers to as "Dead Sea Scrolls". He builds his 168-page profile of Strathcona and his times, for example, largely on the works of W.T.R. Preston (1914), Beckles Willson (1915) and the account that he, Newman, published 32 years ago in *Flame of Power*. In the rest of the volume he draws sometimes on interviews he and Camilla Turner did with a wide variety of people, ranging from Toronto socialites (Posy Chisholm, Liz Tory) through Inuit traders who were visited on his "series of airborne sweeps" into the Arctic. It is not clear who did which interviews or how many were done: Newman says that "nearly a thousand men and women . . . are listed as Resource People in the Appendices of all three books", but actually only 395 names are listed, sometimes the same individual two or three times. Newman recently wrote (in a 19 October 1991 letter to the *Globe and Mail*) that he "spent four years criss-crossing two continents, huddling in their Arctic huts with the Inuit who had traded with the Bay, chasing the HBC's former governors all over Europe, absorbing the feel and warp of their experiences." His endnotes suggest that he has supplemented his interview material about evenly with the feel and warp of fur-trade experiences derived from the published memoirs of the Godsells, R.H.G. Bonnycastle, Sydney Keighley, Ernie Lyall, and several others.

(In letters and interviews Newman has expressed particular pride in having "contributed" to the Archives of the HBC by donating "500 or so" tapes and transcriptions of his interviews. Many historians and journalists make such donations these days. They are usually appraised and receipted as a deductible charitable gift, and this can usefully help offset the costs of research.)

Some readers of *Merchant Princes* may be offended by overtones of denigration in Newman's treatment of both his subjects and his readers. Certainly Kenneth and David Thomson ought to regret the interviews they gave. Many former HBC employees may wonder at the fierceness of Newman's portrayal of their incompetence: "it's a miracle it didn't founder out of a sense of corporate shame", he writes of their Company. And shame on all those HBC men in the North whose "real reason" for giving credit to starving Inuit, Newman claims, "was that dead customers paid off no debts".

Well, Newman's is an "unauthorized" history, we are told in every volume, and he cannot be expected to pull his punches, a few

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of which are solid hits (others, such as the inane Posy Chisholm story about Ken Thomson and his dog are well beneath the range of most non-tabloid authors). Should we not, rather, be delighted at the way in which Newman's books have brought back to life the "dead men from a dead culture", whose "deeds and misdeeds [were] long ago consigned to the dustbin where Canadians store their history"?

Perhaps. But when you think about it, it seems that the principal "dustbin" for the storage of Canadian fur-trade history before it was rescued by Newman must have been this journal, *The Beaver*. Now Canada's leading magazine of popular history, *The Beaver* is still owned by the HBC, a firm which, according to Newman, has "no . . . feeling for history".

What about the academics and fur-trade historians, many of whom (including this reviewer) have offered unkind criticisms of the earlier volumes? In some respects Newman is a little more careful, almost chastened in *Merchant Princes*. No more playful seductions of "bits of brown" as the HBC men feel their way gingerly in the world of Inuit sexual custom. A lot less emphasis on the Company's monopoly, and a better understanding of the development of competition and the opportunities that were missed after 1869. At the same time, however, Newman seems unrepentant in his disdain for the "cell of radical feminists" (*Ottawa Citizen*, 14 November 1987) — including Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk — who attacked his earlier interpretations. *Merchant Princes* contains no more references to "that magic circle" of fur-trade scholars to which it was Newman's "greatest good fortune" to have been admitted in volume one. Instead, Newman has replied to Duncan McDowall's mixed review of his book in the *Globe and Mail* by decrying "the water-biscuit souls of academics". "I broke the rules", he claims, "committing their cardinal sin. I tried to make Canada's history as accessible and compelling as it deserves to be." (*Globe and Mail* 20 October 1991).

Most of us academics will remain unrepentant to the depths of our water-biscuit souls. When we encounter Newman's inability to sort out important primary sources from trivial secondary ones, or important themes and persons from

trivial secondary ones, when we underline his numerous factual errors (Cartwright as Laurier's Finance Minister, every mile of railway in Canada in 1915 privately owned, Marconi the father of trans-Atlantic telegraphy, Van Horne told to lay 2,900 miles of track, and so on), when we wonder about the critical judgement that characterizes Strathcona as an engineer of shameless swindles, a "rogue", a "swashbuckler", a "desperado", when, at the end of the day, we dismiss Newman's HBC histories as artless, sloppy, cardboard rehashing, we can all be disregarded because we know so little about popularization. Isn't it obvious that we're just trying to keep history dead — hidden away in dustbins like *The Beaver* — so that we can preserve our monopoly and hide their heritage from Canadians?

There is a great audience for well-written popular history, which is not very mindful of academic concerns, and Mr. Newman may well have found it. To me, Newman's story-telling is not nearly as readable, coherent, or trustworthy as that of any of Canada's good popularizers: Berton, James H. Gray, Donald McKay, Hugh Dempsey, Daniel Dancocks. He simply isn't in their league, perhaps because much of his early experience was as a political reporter specializing in inside dope and as a journalist writing profiles. He is not a natural story-teller and he seems to have almost no sense of craftsmanship. What Newman himself calls his "overheated prose" is often indigestible, his penchant for masses of irrelevant detail* a crime against the uses of literacy.

Unless it is a conspiracy, perhaps the criticism of Newman's books is just a matter of taste. If you are not one of the people treated unfairly in his HBC books or otherwise

*Irrelevant details were widely used in the writings of Heptimas Ezekial, an inhabitant of East Surrey, England (population 74 souls in 1700, declining to 68 in March, 1831 when George Bostin, a sub-clerk in the Board of Trade, founded the decennial census), who kept cows, pigs, and four knock-kneed children. He once went to London Zoo where he observed two beavers, which did not copulate. One of his books was once seen in a second-hand store, kept by a German fur trader, as far away as Rhingfari, Java.

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offended, perhaps you will find them a great read. He tells us that he wants to be judged, above all, as an "itinerant story-teller" and in the Foreword to *Company of Adventurers* describes Barbara Tuchman describing Kipling's itinerant Indian story-teller, with tales to tell and a rice bowl to fill. "If he sees figures drifting away from the edge of the circle in the darkness, and his audience thinning out, he knows his rice bowl will be meagerly filled . . . I feel just as urgent a connection with the reader."

If the first two volumes have pleased you, by all means help Peter C. Newman refill his rice bowl. If you have been disappointed, or if there is something wrong with your soul, you might share the view that the Hudson's Bay Company, its factors, its fans, its current proprietors, for all their faults, deserved better than this, and you might drift away from the edge of the circle.

Michael Bliss is Professor of History at the University of Toronto. His latest book is "Plague, A Story of Smallpox in Montreal" (Harper Collins, 1991). His book "The Discovery of Insulin" became a popular television drama in the United States and Canada under the title "Glory Enough for All". He is also the author of "Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business" (1987).

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THE PACKET

Letters, Notes and Opinion

Was it Poison?

Regarding the sidebar "Arsenic" to the article "Was it Murder?" [*The Beaver*, October/November 1991] where it asserts that "We shall probably never know" the origin of the arsenic that killed Napoleon on the island of St. Helena, I would refer you to the 1982 book *The Murder of Napoleon* by Ben Weider and David Hapgood, published in Canada by Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd.

The authors very persuasively ascribe his slow poisoning to a tun of wine drunk virtually exclusively by him, and they assert that two men who had drunk it showed the typical symptoms of arsenic poisoning.

Using modern methods of forensic analysis capable of detecting minute amounts of arsenic, they correlate records of his having drunk the wine with meals with the presence of the poison in his hair. Despite the opposition of the French government, they managed to obtain samples of Napoleon's hair, and found that, like knots irregularly tied in a string, the presence of arsenic in samples of hair matched the occasions when he had drunk the wine. They found that the two time lines matched each other. They further traced the origin of the arsenic to one Charles-Tristan de Montholon (1783-1853), count of the old aristocracy, major general, at St. Helena 1815-1821, who served Napoleon as manager of Longwood House, where the fallen soldier lived, and who was in charge of his food supplies.

To me, at least, their painstaking research is convincing.

Gerard Chapman,
Stockbridge, Mass.

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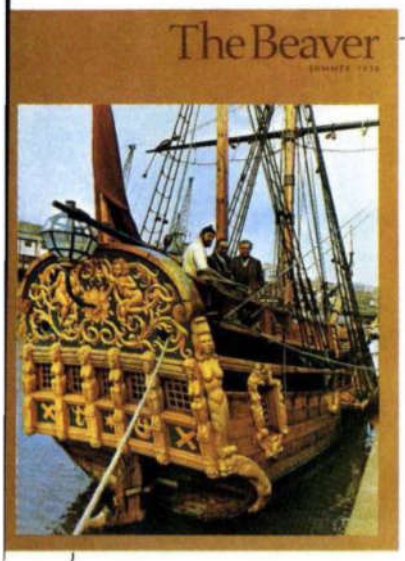

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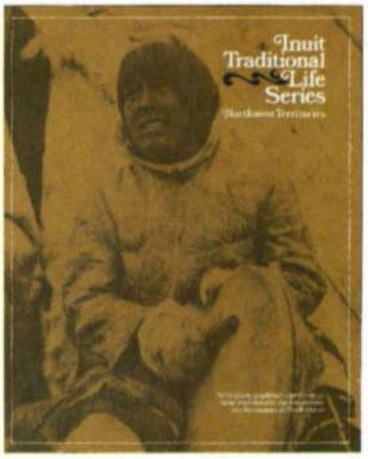

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